



# LAND MARKS IN INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

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## ADDITION AND RATIONALITY IN ECONOMIC BEHAVIOUR

By

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## FOREWORD

In Anthropology, a host of models, functional, structural, ecological, Marxian and organizational, have been enunciated to understand economic life. Dr. Subhadra Channa's book is exemplary in as much as it has brought into focus these various theses in a syncretic representation in the behavioural perspective, thus contributing in an important way to the study of economic life. Moreover, as it is in a behavioural perspective, it provides a readymade design for application to real life situations. The author further provides a model for behaviouristic research since she highlights the close integration of the emic and the etic in bringing out the complexities of the data. The behaviour of the individual is shown to be related to the system. The contribution of this work also lies in highlighting the concept of 'biradari' or community and using it to understand economic behaviour. A new meaning has been given to the concept of rationality in a behaviouristic framework as it is used in explaining economic behaviour by showing that it is the 'biradari' that provides the 'social' rationality that determines individual choice. In presenting the book as a theoretical work on economic anthropology, I wish also to commend it for the description of the occupational life and economic behavioural pattern of a specialized occupational group—the 'dhobis' or washermen. The text provides a life like picture of the dhobis as a group of people with a distinctive way of life. The descriptive portions supported by life histories and case studies give a remarkable in-depth quality to the life style of the dhobis as they exist today. As not much written material exists on the dhobis or washermen or on the economic life of specialized occupations, this work should be valuable as source material for such researchers as are interested in occupational groups or backward classes.



(v)

I am happy to have been associated with the present work since it was first commenced as a *doctoral* dissertation, and has now been appropriately amended and presented as a book relating to an important dimension of academic concern.

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## PREFACE

Field work in an urban area, although deprived of the glamour and romance of the tribal areas is nonetheless equally hazardous. The difficulties of a lone woman moving in the narrow lanes and bylanes of the city at all odd hours are quite comprehensible to anyone familiar with city life. But the rewards of field work, apart from the theoretical aspect, lie in the human contact, the warmth and friendliness (sometimes unfriendliness) of the people with whom one is working. After the initial period of curiosity and suspicion I was able to establish a decent rapport and also in many cases friendly relations translated into fictive kinship such as "Didi" (sister) or "bhabhi" (sister-in-law). Being a woman I could get especially close to the women sharing in their day-to-day experiences. With the men the relationships were more ambiguous although they did feel free to talk to me as they did not categorise me as a woman in their own cultural definition. I was different, independent and educated and talked about things like a man. But the people as a whole did feel protective towards me. I was escorted to odd places and seen safely to a transport at odd hours of the night. The considerable data that I was able to collect, not all of which has found its way into this book, I was able to do, because of the cooperation of the people I studied. A semi-participant observation was one of the major tools of collection of data. An extensive schedule was also prepared and administered to a sample of about 102 households; these covered practically the entire community. The total number of households was about 350, out of which many shared the same roof and were separate only in terms of the hearth. Such households have not been administered separate schedules. Considerable use has also been made of life histories and case studies. An attempt was made to get a fair representation of histories of the young and old male and female educated and

In spite of working in an urban area, I was able to apply traditional anthropological techniques to my field because even though physically present in an urban area, the group was broadly homogenous, identifiable and a closed boundary system that presented a fairly small universe for in-depth study. In fact this characteristic along with their being a specialized occupational group was my main reasons for selecting the dhobis for my study. They were rooted in a fairly closed system but open to the influences of a complex environment—an ideal situation for studying economic behaviour in the face of widening choices.

My first debt of gratitude is to my informants with whom I shared their meals, their joys and sorrows. I had participated in their functions, listened at length to their life histories, their problems and their plans. It is difficult to name each one separately but collectively I would like to thank them all.

In bringing out this work which was originally presented as a doctoral thesis to the University of Delhi, my acknowledgements are due to Prof. J. D. Mehra for his guidance, cooperation and understanding. I am also grateful to the University Grants Commission which supplied me with a fellowship for conducting research.

The present work is a revised edition of the original thesis, in which some addition has been made to give a background to readers who do not have a theoretical knowledge of economic anthropology but would like to read the book as of general interest on economic change, development and as a case study of a backward caste group. To this effect an appendix has been added.

Throughout the difficult periods of field work, research and writings Vardesh remained a pillar of help and understanding, and literally pushed me through it all. My deepest gratitude is to my mother, who in the last analysis one might say 'created' the 'creator'. Two persons who would have been very happy to see my humble effort—my father and my mother-in-law—to their memory I dedicate this work.

SUBHADRA CHANNA

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## THE PROBLEM AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Economic Anthropologists have had as their scope of study, primitive economies, which are identified in terms of their characteristics in having a simple technology, informal work organisation, non-monetary exchange and distribution patterns. In addition, there is the implicit assumption that primitive economies characterise a certain kind of society, namely primitive or traditional. However, there is a trend in Anthropology towards applying anthropological methodology and theory to complex societies.

The validity of using economic anthropological theory for such economies that are totally capitalistic or modern has not been demonstrated and formal economic theory is already 'taking care' of such economies. But there are situations where a traditional society has not been greatly penetrated by world-wide economic networks and still retains sufficient features of traditional economy to be identified and studied using anthropological methods. The major point of interest in such a work would be to study such a traditional economic organisation in relation to the wider economic system within which it is placed. And to see both the degree to which traditionality has

been retained and what new economic viability has been given to the traditional system.

It is with this end in view that I have chosen a group of the traditional functionary caste group of washermen (dhobis) who reside in the city of Old Delhi. Delhi is the capital city of India and an urban metropolis with complex economic networks linking it with the rest of the country as well as the world. However, we find that this community of dhobis are continuing in their traditional occupation with modifications that are still insignificant enough to change either their overall occupational identity or their traditional socio-cultural system.

The major focus of this work is to study the traditional socio-cultural system of these dhobis, especially their economic organisation—production, exchange, consumption and occupational structure. This is then viewed in relation to the wider society and economy in which they are placed.

The choice of the dhobis as a field of study touches upon another significant social problem that exists in India today. Hindu society, traditionally, was and still is although to a lesser extent, a regime of castes. The North Indian model of caste envisages a four-fold classification of castes into the hierarchically arranged categories or Brahmin, Kshtriya, Vaishya and Shudra. For quite some time now, but especially after the Independence of India in 1947, there has been a grave concern with the lot of the castes belonging to the Shudra fold, sometimes called the low castes or the untouchable castes. These comprise the various castes associated with traditional, hereditary occupations such as scavengers, leather and hide workers, washermen, barbers and the like. These castes were considered as socially low and economically deprived and consequently their cause was espoused by many a political group and a broad spectrum of political leaders. They constituted at the time of India's Independence, roughly 15% of the Indian population.

The framers of the Constitution of India, 1950 placed these castes in a special Schedule (and hence the name Scheduled Caste) and reserved for people falling under this category special rights and privileges vis-a-vis the union of India. These rights included such privileges as preferential treatment

in schooling, reservation of jobs and other economic preferences.

The economic system that we are studying cannot be called a primitive economy. Our sample shows many deviations from such an economy in the use of all purpose money, extensive links with a market economic network and by its placement in an urban, complex metropolis. Otherwise, in its productive aspects and in terms of the organisation of their socio-economic system, they show remarkable similarity to primitive economic systems. They have a simple labour intensive technology, a household division of labour, an informal work organisation and a largely bounded social system. The last named is characterized by endogamy, economic cooperation and informal sanctions, which are integrated with their organization of work. There, thus, exists a duality in the field situation, the dhobi socio-economic system on the one hand and the outside system on the other hand.

The concept of rationality has been the point of debate between two schools of economic anthropologists, the formalists and the substantivists. According to the substantivists formal economic theories and the concept of individual rationality can be used in the context of capitalistic economies only. Consequently they deny the same economic rationality to the members of primitive economic systems. The other school, that of the formalists, put forward universal unity of mankind in terms of basic economic behaviours and are of the opinion that each individual is economically rational in terms of maximization of satisfaction. According to Raymond Firth, a formalist, this maximization is in the context of an individual's socio-cultural set up and relativity of rationality is in teams of changing context rather than any change in the nature of rationality itself.

The relativistic nature of rationality has further been taken up by Maurice Godelier using a different approach from Firth (who bases his analysis essentially on the individual) by subserving the role of the individual to the system. He attributes to all societies the nature of a system and postulates that this system has an inner logic of its own which is the unintentional social rationality (Godelier 1967), individual rationality



is but an aspect of this. He however ultimately takes a historical materialistic stand point denying any role to the individual and his analysis.

In this book I propose to use the concept of 'social rationality' taken not in Maurice Godelier's sense of an 'inner' relation between structures but more eclectically as an "inner logic" of systems. Though Godelier, in his work *Rationality and Irrationality in Economics*, has largely expanded on the structuralist meaning, yet he has made reference in one or two places implying 'rationality' as a kind of inner logic.

Godelier's problem was to give a reason based on Marxism for the obvious dominance of structures other than economic in some primitive and peasant societies. To quote, "everything that we know of ethnology and history shows that in all societies, individuals and groups have tried to maximize certain objectives, the context and order of priority of which expressed the dominance of certain social relations as compared with others, and were rooted in the very structure of each type of society....Analyzing the reason why one structure rather than another should have been accorded this central importance means working towards the discovery of a 'social rationality' of which as we see, economic rationality is only one aspect." (1972, p. 21)

This social rationality, according to Godelier, lies in the hierarchy or social structures in a society, this hierarchy, in turn, being related to the dominant values. What is generally regarded as a lack of economic rationality in primitive and peasant societies, i. e. the absence of profit motivation in a capitalist sense, is explainable by this hierarchy of structures. "The economic optimum is not the maximum possible use of these factors that is best adjusted to the functioning of the society's structures...". "The intentional rationality of the economic behaviour of a society's members is thus always governed by the fundamental unintentional rationality of the hierarchical structure of social relations that characterize this society."

The ultimate reference to values is not much different from that of Firth and other formalists but the fundamental difference between the formalists and substantivists such as

Godelier and Sahlins lies in the former's emphasis on individuals and their behaviour as the unit of study and the latter's occupation with societies as working systems in which individuals play only incidental roles. They study not individuals and their behaviour as organizational building blocks of society but "economies" as wholes evolving and changing with time though the working of forces largely supra individual in nature. The formalists are generally confined to the present while the substantivists are historical and neoevolutionary.

In the present work a rather bold, if eclectic, approach has been experimented with, to combine individual rationality with 'social rationality' and to find the relationship between the two.

In this book we do not reject the study of individual decision making processes which assume that individuals always strive towards maximization of satisfaction (Robbins Burling, 1962; Firth, 1967, Ledair and Schneider, 1962; Belshaw 1967). While subscribing to the formalists' point of view that individuals act economically and rationally in their respective cultural contexts we understand it along with the concept of social rationality and identify the inner characteristics of the total system which the individuals are operating.

We, here accept Sahlins idea of the system rationality or substantive rationality as being historically evolved and providing for the minimal survival needs of what Sahlins calls "ecological selection....In general and on balance, and especially in production, the people will have to handle their resources with a view towards utilitarian advantage" (1969, p. 28). Sahlins clearly emphasizes the nature of a "minimum" survival adaptation as against "maximization" of the formalists—but this is at the level of the system. "Apparent further elaboration by Marshall Sahlins on the concept of "social rationality" states "substantive and relative, such rationality is specifically of "the system". It is the way in which the system is materially sustained, of which the well being of people is only one aspect ....Product of the culture rather than of the individual. The substantive rationality is constituted rather than willed, unintentional (in Godelier's terms) rather than intentional (1969 p 29)

Marshall Sahlins, in a characteristic neo-evolutionist stand point relates this social rationality to an substantivist rationality i. e. the system always tries to assure survival minima for its members and does not strive towards maximizations or creation of surpluses the overall rationality of the system is one that is evolved by the society as a process of ecological adaptation historically over time. While Sahlins rules out the study of individual level maximization processes in primitive society, Scott Cook (1973) rightly points towards an integration of the macro and micro processes for a complete economic anthropological analysis. Identity between formal rationality as economizing and the substantive rationality as adaptation is nevertheless misleading. The former is a strategy of the maximum, whereas adaptation is the achievement of a minimum" (1969, p. 29). Thus on one hand we have individual maximization (formalist) and on the other hand system level maximization (substantivist). We also see, given the background of the total system that individuals strive, to make the best use of their available resources to arrive at an optimum condition —subject to the fact that this optimum condition is conditioned by the overall rationality of the system.

By assuming that economic rationality is only an aspect of social rationality and subserving the individual maximizing behaviour to the total system, we are in some ways contradicting Belshaw's and Barth's theory of social exchange in which the structure of a society is seen to be moulded by individual rationalistic behaviour. To quote Schneider who summarizes Belshaw's point of view "...we immediately recognise that all interaction between people who have inter-dependent needs constitute social transactions. The flow of these transactions throughout an integrated system creates the family structure and other regular social patterns. The study of society becomes therefore the study of the flow of transaction" (Schneider, 1974 ; p. 134).

Further to quote Barth on the same lines, "what we see as a social form is coincidedly, a pattern of distribution of behaviour by different persons and on different occasions. I would argue that it is not useful to assume that this empirical pattern is a sought for condition, which all members of the community equally value and wiffully maintain. Rather it must be regarded

as an epiphenomenon of a great variety of processes in combination..." (Barth, 1967, p. 662).

I would like to suggest that this method of conceiving society as a resultant of processes of allocation has explanatory value only at the situational level, it precludes the overall characteristic of a system, like Godelier's example of the overall domination of kinship in primitive societies. For example, it cannot explain the reasons why people belonging to one culture should have differently conceived rationality for allocating resources from people of another culture. Similarly, while it is possible to view the dynamics within the caste system as a process of maximization and allocation, it is impossible to conceive of the total caste system itself being a resultant of such individual level processes. And once we accept that the overall system has a historically evolved existence (which may have been ecologically adaptive) and we identify a rationality that belongs to the system, which is a substantive rationality, serving in any one instance to provide minimal subsistence requirement of the society, we can show that individual maximizing behaviour or economic rationality is only an aspect of this. So whatever processes occur as resultants of individual behaviour (which in itself is to be seen as economically rational) is not independent of the unintentional systems rationality and it is this that provides the overall explanatory framework and not simply individual behaviour, which is encompassed within it.

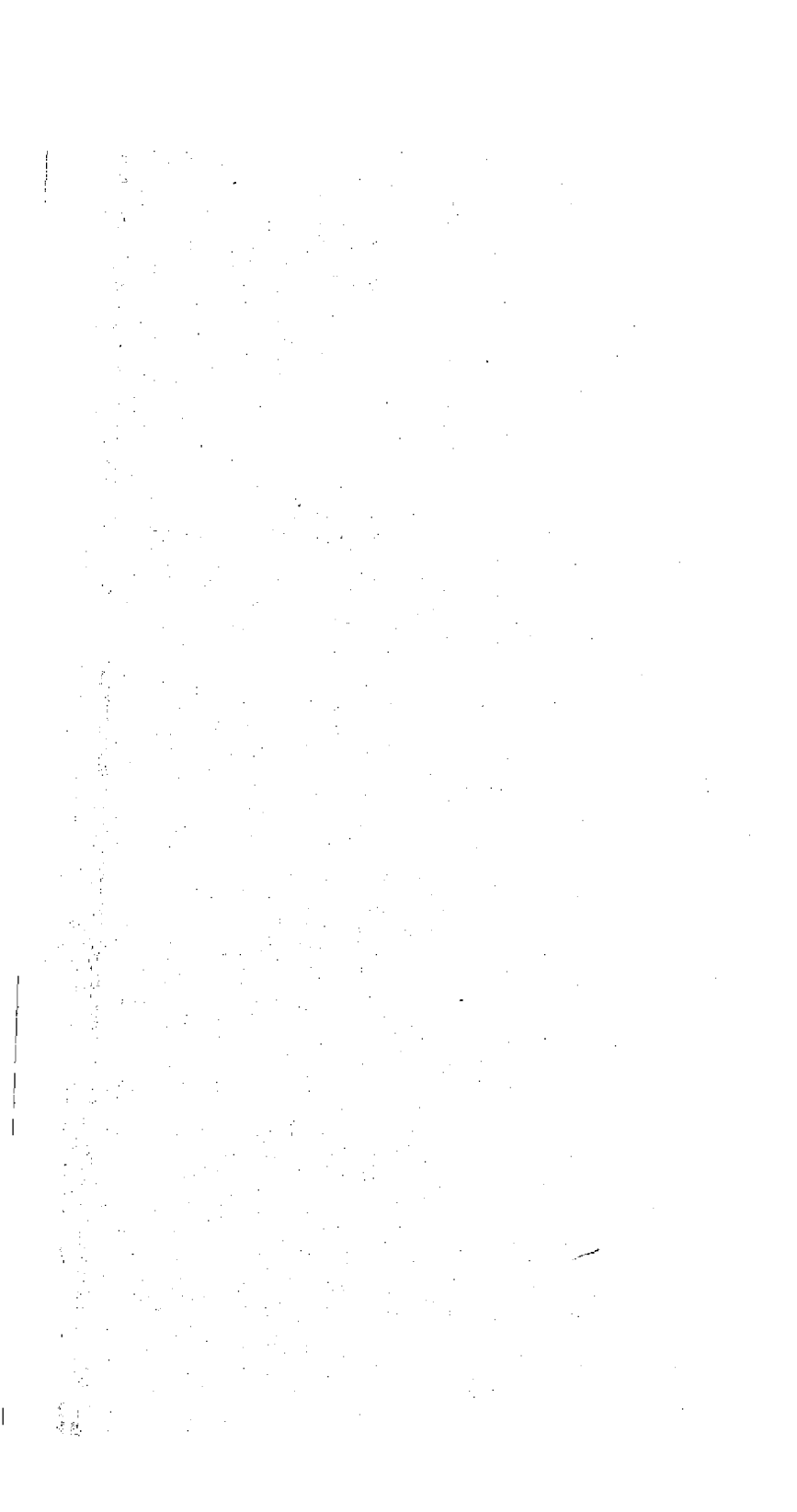
Let us now come to the specific field area and problem of economic behaviour amongst the 'sheheri' dhobis, a washerman caste group living in old Delhi. Now the overall system here is the Indian society which was largely organized on caste principles. Basically this involves a division of society into endogamous groups, often characterised by hereditary occupations (Hutton, 1951). The actual divisions are quite complex and a fair amount of dynamism is involved (Orans, 1968 ; Srinivas, 1957 ; Leach, 1960 ; Mayer, 1956).

Our own group, the sheheri dhobis are a sub-caste of the larger caste of Washermen or Dhobis who have washing of clothes as the hereditary profession. The historical process of division through which this group has crystallised is discussed in the chapter *The Social Profile*. What is important for us, for our

theoretical approach, is that they are a small group, local, endogamous and characterised by hereditary occupation. This small group, or the 'biradari' as it is called, is the pivot of our theoretical analysis. We will show that the capacity or function of this small, endogamous, occupational group to provide for the substantive or minimal needs of its members is the 'rationality' on which the system operates. It is the biradari as a social security system that serves as the backdrop to individual actions. The security offered by the biradari (a culturally adaptive mechanism) is of the survival kind, not one geared to generating 'surpluses'. The individual's maximising behaviour should, on the basis of purely economic rationality, be geared to just this end. However, in the empirical situations this is rarely or never so. "Indeed the knowledge that formal optima are not achieved or even approached by economic actions or units in particular situations and, more specifically the degree of such underperformance is important in understanding the nature of their actual adaptation. No empirical economy, pre-industrial or otherwise, has ever achieved optimal resource use" (Cook, 1973, p. 844).... "Anthropological studies of economic decision making in pre-industrial societies invariably suggest that an extremum principle operates relatively (situationally) rather than absolutely (uniformly)"—(ibid). In other words the maximisation behaviour is situational to the uniform overall activity of the 'unintentional systems rationality'. That is 'underperformance' of actors is explained by the more efficient (or operimum) performance of the system.

Further, since the systems rationality is an adaptive measure it is also evolutionary and consequently open to change. As a pre-industrial economy is penetrated by industrial economic networks, one expects a modification of the social rationality that operated in the pre-industrial society. It is not to be seen as a clash between individualistic rationality and traditional social rationality, but the impact of the rationality of the external system over the traditional system. So that when individual maximizing action goes contrary to 'biradari' principles i.e. becomes achievement oriented and individualistic, it is a resultant of the industrialised sector, the outer society surrounding the dhobi 'biradari', which is atomistic, individual achievement oriented and not based upon a small group security providing system

In fact the dhobis have seen the transition of surroundings from the pre-industrial city of Old Delhi to the linking of old city to the metropolitan city of Delhi, the capital of India with consequent modernization, industrialization and factors of change. So that here we have a case of cultural, economic interaction of a system with its environment.



## A SOCIAL PROFILE OF THE "SHEHI RI-DHOBIS"

### The People

The sheheri dhobis are Hindu by religion and Hindi speaking. They are patrilineal, patrilocal, generally monogamous though polygyny is acceptable and sometimes practised. Both sororal and leviral forms of marriage are found. There is no direct exchange of women but women move in one direction i.e. girl married into the same household into which her father's sister has been married. Due to the small endogamous circle, marriage between second order relatives cannot always be avoided, though it is sought to be avoided between first order kin. There is general observance of the principle that wife givers cannot be wife-receivers and vice versa. Dowry is nominal but a woman is given gifts by her natal household at all ritual and festive occasions for the one year following her marriage. After the one year, gift giving may stop or be significantly reduced.

They follow the North Indian kinship terminology. Fictive kinship terms may be used between members of the 'biradari' who are not related to each other as when a younger person is addressing another older than him/her. This is in accordance



with the 'biradari' value of respect shown to elders and the norm that a respected person is not to be addressed directly by name. It also supports the idea that the 'biradari' is one large kinship group.

Living in joint family based household is preferred. In practice, however, there is a preponderance of nuclear family based households. Larger households are quite often only a transitional phase and soon break up into smaller units. Details of household organisation and break up are discussed in later parts of the dissertation (Refer Appendix III).

The brother-sister bond is ideologically the most affective amongst the kinship bonds and hence as an extension of the brother-sister tie, an individual's FZH and one's own ZH are important persons. They play a significant ritual role in any marriage. They act as the go-between in carrying gifts to and fro. Invitations to a wedding are sent through these two relatives, the reins of the mare ridden by the bridegroom, is held by the ZH. Within a family the eldest male member is the head. Even when a household splits in terms of consumption and work, the male head is consulted in every important matter. Though men play the major role in decision making, the role of the women is important because of their indispensable economic contribution to the work process. Often women have considerable say in household matters.

Inheritance follows the pattern of ultimogeniture. It is the youngest son who inherits both the assets and liabilities of his father as well as his social obligations, such as gift giving to married daughters of the household. It is also the duty of the youngest son to look after his parents in their old age.

Kinship is reckoned bilaterally, in fact the entire 'biradari' is assumed to be an extended kinship group. One's patrilineal kin stand in direct line of authority over an individual while relationship with matrilineal kin are more affective.

The dhobis are Hindus and hence subscribe largely to the ideology of the Hindu religion. They believe in the Hindu pantheon of Gods and Goddesses, but as we shall show later, their ideas and beliefs are also influenced by the Muslims. They show greater faith in the worship of the Mother Goddess, and eat meat and drink alcohol during ritual celebrations.

The dhobis observe all the ritual festivals of the Hindus but the festival of Holi is the most important for them. Traditionally, this festival has been associated with the castes of the Shudra Varna. It involves the burning of Holika—made out from fire-wood and shoots of green grams. The celebrations involve throwing of coloured water, eating sweets and drinking of alcohol, singing and dancing. In fact the bawdy celebration of Holi by the dhobis is often condemned by the higher castes.

The festivals of Raksha-Bandhan and 'Bhai-Dooj' which cement the bond of love between brother and sister and invoke the obligation of the brother to protect his sister, are also important for the dhobis, as also the festival of "Karba-Chauth" in which women keep a fast for the long life and welfare of their husbands.

The dhobis also perform rituals concerned with the stone on which they wash clothes, once a year. This celebration is always held on the banks of the river Jamuna and dhobis of all sub-castes, including Muslims, assemble for a community worship and feasting.

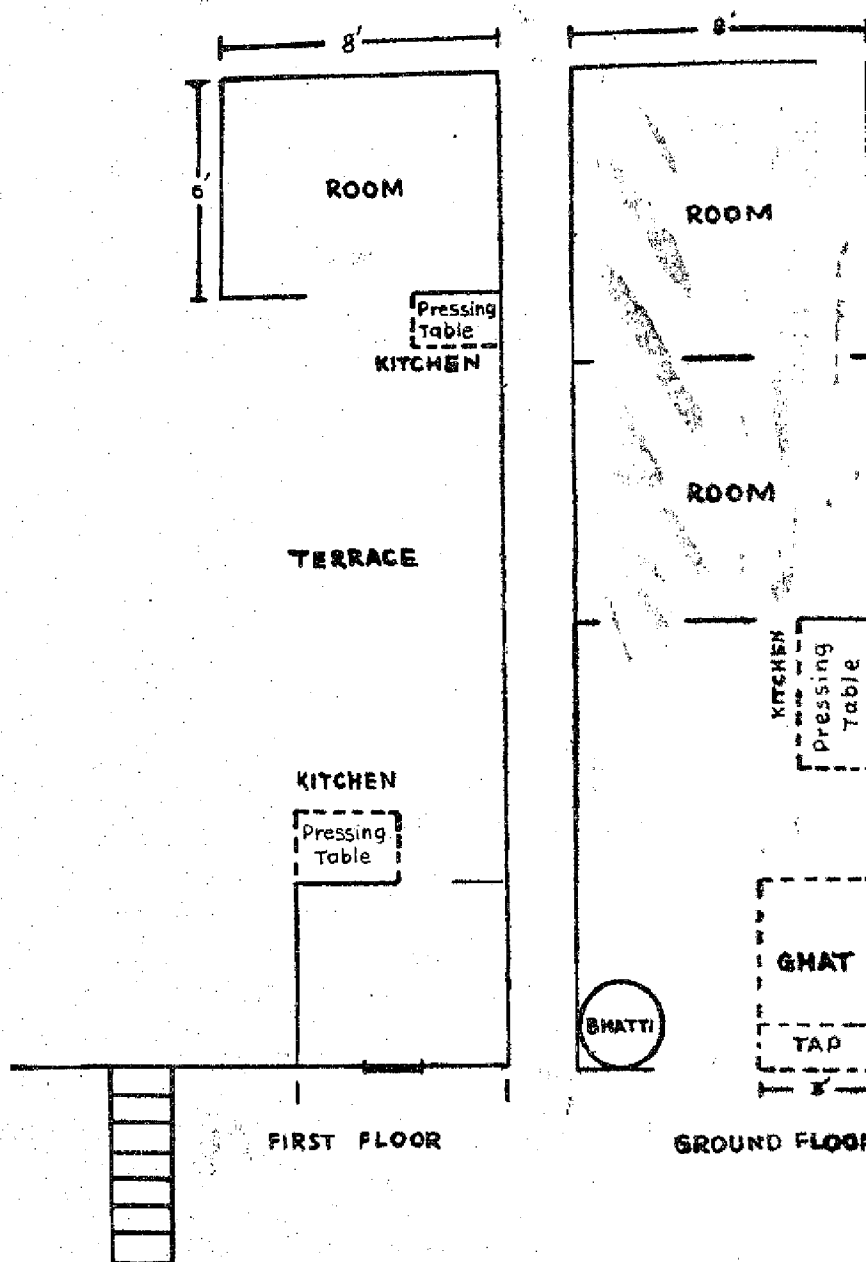
The dhobis believe in ghosts. Since their washing ghats at the Jamuna are near the cremation grounds, they claim that ghosts from the cremation ground haunt the washing ghats at night. They also claim that ghosts never harm the dhobis when they spend the night at the Jamuna tending their bhatti fire because the dhobis are part of that environment. Similarly they believe that when water snakes come out while they are washing clothes, all that they have to do is to make a request with folded hands, and the snake goes away.

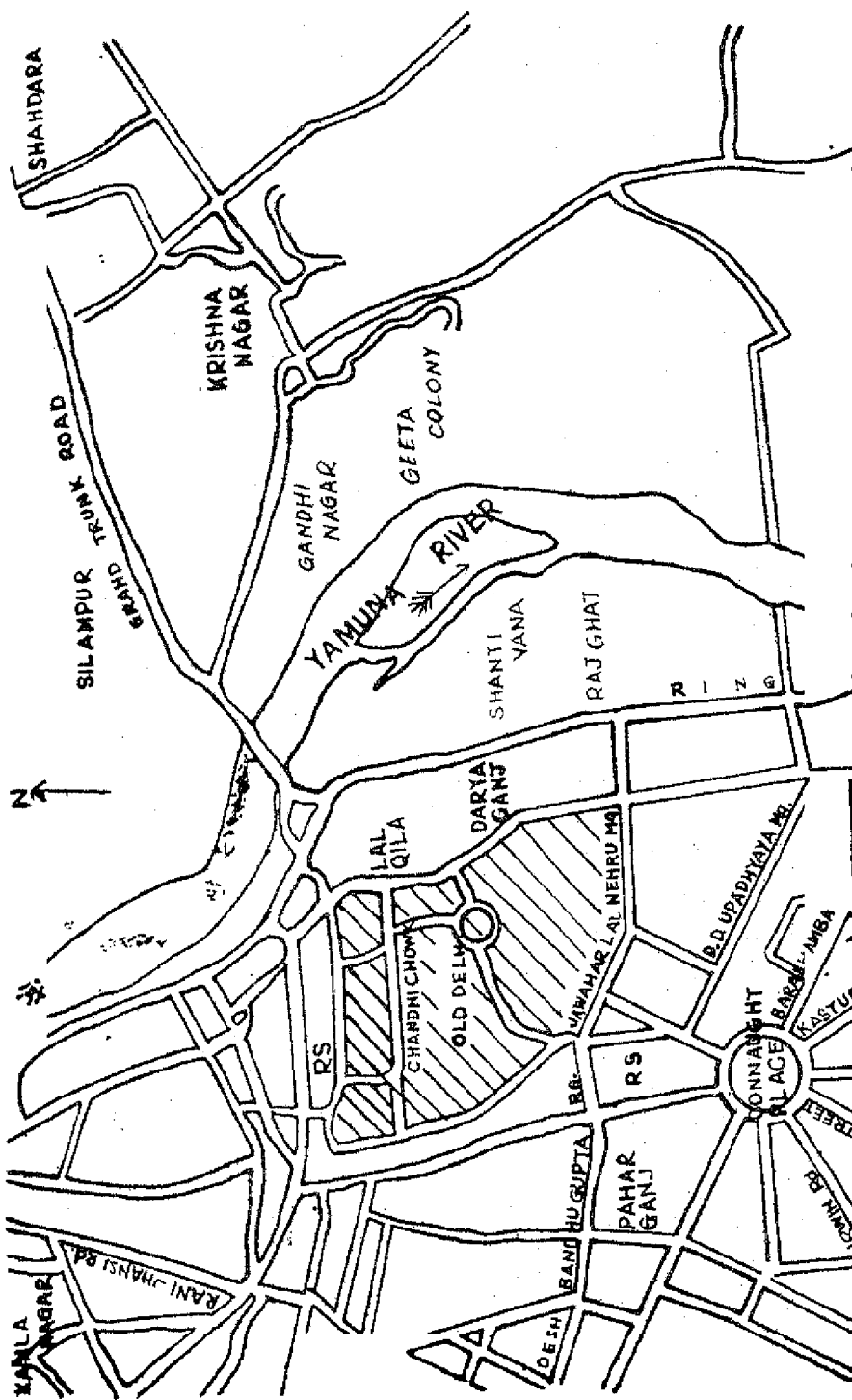
They also have faith in sooth-sayers and exorcists. For diseases like small-pox or chicken pox they always go to a sooth-sayar, rather than to a regular medical practitioner.

### **Geographical location and pattern of living**

Before Independence the "sheheri" dhobis in Delhi were concentrated in areas around Sitaram Bazar, Farash Khana, Billimaran, Chitlikabar, etc., all deep in the heart of the walled city. During and after the Hindu-Muslim riots in 1947, the dhobis spread to other parts of the city. They had been living in close quarters with the Muslims and found it safer to shift

## Plan of Dhobi House





from riot stricken zones to parts of Kashmiri Gate like Hamilton Road and to New Delhi near the Minto Bridge and Connaught Circus.

Today, they are settled in some fourteen clusters of which some eight are still deep inside the city. Only recently, particularly during the "Emergency" (1975-76) some of the dhobis were displaced from their original settlements and resettled across the River Jamuna in places like Seelampur, Gandhinagar etc. Only a few households are scattered in isolated places, the rest all live in clusters. Some of them live in the servant quarters attached to high government and Railway officials near Hardinge Bridge and New Delhi. Their total strength is about 350 households in terms of separate hearths while population wise they should figure around 1500-2000 persons.

The walled city of Delhi or Shahazehanabad was settled by the emperor Shah Jehan in 1648. It contains many structures of the 16th century like the Jama Masjid and Red Fort. Apart from the central wide road known as Chandni Chowk, the rest of the area is a criss-cross of narrow lanes and bylanes. The dhobis live in what are known as 'Katras', which is a group of houses located around a central courtyard--the cluster is nearly closed and entrance to it is through a very narrow lane, often just wide enough for people to pass in single file. These are away from the main roads and one has to pass through several lanes and bylanes to reach a 'Katra'.

The houses are very small, roughly 200 sq ft. in ground area and have one or two rooms, placed one behind the other. A door in the centre leads from one room to the other. There are no windows. In some 'Katras', the rooms may be side by side with a covered verandah in front. The bigger houses may have a large uncovered courtyard, though the actual number of rooms is never more than two on the ground floor. Some persons have added one or two rooms on the first floor. These are even smaller than those on the ground floor and often just temporary structures like a wooden or tin shed. The staircase is from the outside of the house and may often be just a ladder. In most cases there is just one staircase for all the first floors in a katra and one may have to pass in front of all the houses, to reach a certain place. The net result of this style of living is that

there is very little privacy of individual households. All the people living in a 'Katra' live almost like in a long house, with children crawling all over the place and people in one house carrying out conversations with people in adjacent houses, as they engage in their daily work.

Individuals frequently move around the 'Katra' and one often finds a person from one house tending a child in another, or children from one house sleeping in another, or taking a bath at another person's water tap. In their overall appearance, all the houses in a 'Katra' are similar, although the size of the rooms and the actual space occupied by a household may differ. Houses also differ in their furnishings. The houses of the better off dhobis may contain luxury goods like T.V. and sofa sets. But by and large houses appear overcrowded. All houses will have, in addition to the household possessions, piles of clothes heaped around, which have come from clients for washing and ironing.

In those houses which have their own 'ghats' (washing place), the 'ghat' is in the front courtyard of the house. The kitchen is always on the outer verandah—the general pattern is for one side of the verandah to be occupied by the ghat, on the opposite side is the 'bhatti' (steaming apparatus). Further inside, on one side is a table used for ironing clothes and on the other side is the kitchen, which mainly consists of one or two 'chullahs' and some utensils. Women do the cooking sitting on the ground. The inner rooms serve as living rooms and bed rooms, wherein there are waist high platforms running all along the walls which function as sleeping berths. At any time in a 'Katra', one finds a general commotion of work, talk, movement and appearance of crowding. Men will be seen beating out clothes on the platforms in front of their houses, some, especially older ones, would be sitting out on string cots, smoking and chatting amongst themselves. A number of women would be inside their houses, standing and ironing, some would be gossiping while they do work like cooking or washing of utensils or simply resting from their work, while they nurse a child at their breasts.

Children would be running around, either playing or helping the adults in work. There would hardly be a girl more than eight or ten years old who would not be carrying on the hip or look-

ing after one or even more younger children.

Dhobi women not only iron clothes inside the houses but outside the 'Katras' as well. In the narrow lanes, one finds women with their ironing tables or platforms, standing or sitting on the ground, ironing clothes. Heaps of clothes are constantly moved in and out of the 'Katras'. Men, women and children, on foot or using bicycles or thelas are engaged in carrying in dirty clothes, or taking them out to the river to be washed or dried or carrying out clean clothes to be delivered to the clients.

Each dhobi 'Katra' is a centre of life and activity, noisiness and odours, a lot of people and innumerable children. In fact the number of children is so large that a person not accustomed can hardly move around without the danger of stumbling over some crawling baby or infant. The adults in a 'Katra' as a matter of habit push and slap children away from their path of progress.

Inside the house all kinds of improvisations are made to accommodate as many things as possible in a small space. Bricks are placed under the legs of cots to raise them higher so that a variety of objects can be pushed under. If there are chairs and tables these are piled one on top of the other. Sofas are piled over with clothes and a large number of objects are placed on shelves built along the walls. These shelves have on them crockery, photographs of Gods and Goddesses and the national leaders, film stars and framed photographs of family members and haphazard collection of cheap decoration objects, artificial flowers, toys, etc.

As many as sixteen members including seven or eight adults may occupy such a dwelling. In summer, some people sleep outside the house but in winter and during the rains people sleep huddled and squeezed in the rooms.

In the Minto Road area, outside the old city, at one place there is a hall about thirty feet long and twelve feet wide—accommodating three unrelated households—each having ten to fifteen members. Of those who have been displaced from their original dwellings during the Emergency in 1975-76 (in slum clearing operations), some prefer to stay within the city—in temporary tent like homes—rather than go to the plots allotted to them at the city outskirts some 12-14 km away. They have kept their furniture and valuables with their relatives staying in the city

In some neighbourhoods, there is a well in the centre from which the inhabitants get their water supply. There are municipality water taps in many houses/katras as well as electricity. There are no lavatories attached to individual houses but a set of public latrines in the neighbourhood. Previously there were no flush latrines but for some fifteen years with the establishment of flush latrines, a certain amount of cleanliness has been achieved.

Those who have bullock and carts generally keep them outside the Katra on the road nearest to it. Some adult men of the 'Katra' generally sleep outside on the 'thelas' to look after them at night.

On Hailey Road the government has built small flats for the dhobis, each consisting of two small rooms, separate kitchen, lavatory and bath. Only three households of "sheheri" dhobis live here, the rest of the flats being occupied by non "sheheri" dhobis and others. Though the living space is more decent than the average living quarters of dhobis, yet they are marred by overcrowding, dirt and smoke from 'chullahs'. Lack of maintenance and misuse has given a slum like appearance to these flats.

The city zone, in which the dhobis live, is highly congested with very high density of population and is a commercial area. It is the centre for wholesale trade in cloth, paper, grain, gold and silver and a variety of other goods. The original traders in this area were the Aggarwals, Maheshwari and Khandelwal banyas but now they have been joined by the Punjabi traders who came from Pakistan after 1947. Other high castes residing here are the Brahmins and the Kayasthas. There is a considerable population of Jains. The low castes who live here are the Khatiks or fruit sellers, the Chamars, the Kumhars, the Malhas and the 'Bhangis'. There is a sub-caste of sweepers (Bhangis) corresponding to the 'sheheri' dhobis called the 'sheheri' bhangis who are amongst the oldest residents of the city.

### **History**

There are a few legends about the origin of the dhobis. T.S Katiyar (1964) in his book "*Social Life in Rajasthan*", writing about the origin of the dhobis says, "a man named Dhumar, washed the clothes of Shri Ishwar Nath Ji (God) He had two



sons Merota and Bacheta. The families expanded and dhobis came into existence. They are named after their occupation—Dhona—to wash”.

Russell, R.V. and Hiralal (1916) write, “Name derived from the Hindi ‘dhona’ and the sanskrit ‘dhav’, to wash... No account worth reproduction has been obtained of the origin of the caste. In the Central Provinces it is purely functional, as is shown by its sub-division. They are generally [of a territorial nature and indicate that the dhobis like the other professional castes have come here from all parts of the country. Instances of sub-castes are : Baonia and Beraria, Nalu, Bundelkhandi, Nimaria, Kanaujia, Udaipuria etc. A separate sub-caste is formed of Muhammadon Dhobis”. (Russel and Hiralal, p. 519).

In the Glossary of *Punjab Tribes and Castes* vol. 2 the following account is written of the dhobis : “dhobi : perhaps the most clearly defined and the one most nearly approaching a true caste of all the Menial and Artisan castes. He is found under that name throughout the Punjab.... He is the washerman of the country, but with washing, he generally combines, especially in the centre, and west of the Province, the craft of calico-printing.. He stands below the Nai, but perhaps above the Kumhar. He often takes to working as a Darzi or Tailor, and in Peshawar dhobi simply means a dyer (rangrez). He is most often a Musalman.... The Dhobi sections appear to be few. They include

- |           |            |             |
|-----------|------------|-------------|
| 1. Agrai  | 5. Kambah  | 9. Rikhari  |
| 2. Akthra | 6. Khokkar | 10. Larli   |
| 3. Bhalam | 7. Kohans  | 11. Lippal” |
| 4. Bhatti | 8. Mahmal  |             |

Elliot, H.M. (1969) states that the dhobi is considered one of the lowest castes of Hindus. “Of Dhobis, as to several other of the inferior tribes, there are generally reckoned to be seven sub-divisions, Kanaujia, Magahya, Pagahya, Belwar, Balam, Sri-Bathem, Bhakra. The Kanaujia are to be found chiefly from Kanauj to the borders of Behar and extend into Gorakhpur. None of these castes eat, drink or marry together. The seven sub-divisions are not retained under the same name” (p. 81).

The sub-caste ‘sheheri’ has not been mentioned by any of the authors quoted above which leads us to believe that they are

localized in Delhi—a view that is shared by the ‘sheheri’ dhobis themselves. Even the other sub-castes mentioned by the ‘sheheris’ namely ‘kampowale’ ‘Tijoria’ etc, do not appear in these texts. This could also be due to the fact that the names of the same sub-caste may be differently known or pronounced in different regions. What is more interesting is the fact that geographical localization is sufficient reason for the formation of new sub-caste which tends to become endogamous. The formation of sub-castes through localization is confirmed by the fact that the sub-caste mentioned for different regions by different authors noted, do not overlap.

The fact that the ‘sheheri dhobis’ are a local group is also confirmed by their name which is derived from the word ‘sheheri’ meaning city, and which refers to their long association with the city of Delhi. Little is known about the actual origin and history of the “sheheri dhobis” but from the memory recollect of some old informants, they were residents of Delhi even at the time of the 1857 First War of Independence. They recollect stories connected with loot and plunder by the British soldiers of the dhobi households at that time.

A story related by an old informant regarding their existence as a separate sub-caste in the city goes as follows. “There were some dhobis in Delhi from the time of the Moghals—the Tijoria (who are supposed to trace descent from the town of Tijarat) and others (Purbias) who came later, around the advent of the British in India. Previously they ate and drank together, had the same “hookah” and were part of the same endogamous group. On the day of Jafat they had assembled on the banks of the river Jamuna for a communal feast. The cook, who had traditionally been a Muslim, while cooking the rice, dipped his fingers in twice, to taste the food. The Purbias saw it and objected, saying that they would not eat rice which was polluted by tasting. If the cook had dipped his fingers in once, it would have been alright, but he had done it twice, which meant that his saliva had gone into the food. From that day onwards the Purbia and the Tijoria separated for the purposes of marriage, inter-dining and “hookah”, and formed a separate group. The Purbias, by virtue of their having severed all ties with their native villages in Purab (which implies any place in Uttar Pradesh) took on the name

'sheheri', to become a localized group in Delhi, with no attachment to their place of origin." Thus by this story the "sheheri" are connected to the Purbias.

There is another sub-caste, in Delhi, of dhobis who form an off-shoot of the sheheri dhobis. These are the "Campo-wale", their name derived from the Army Camps or Cantonments where they resided and washed clothes of the Army men. These dhobis had moved away from the city of Delhi, to accompany the army as it moved from cantonment to cantonment. Some of them came back to Delhi to resettle, but were rejected by the residents, sedentary population, who branded them as nomadic and asked them to form their own sub-caste, in terms of marriage and panchayat. Since their origin and marriage practices are the same as 'sheheri' dhobis, there is sometimes confusion as to their identity by outsiders i.e. dhobis other than "sheheri" or "Campowale" tend to lump them together as 'sheheri'. But they are clearly distinguished by practices of endogamy and separate panchayats.

### **Inter-caste and Intra-caste relationships**

The dhobis belong to the Shudra Varna and are considered untouchables by all persons belonging to the twice born castes. The dhobis are placed in approximately the same category as the Kumhar (potter), Khatik (vegetable seller) etc., though higher than the bhangis (scavengers) in the traditional system of caste groupings, prevalent in this region, as it is acknowledged and accepted by most caste groups, including the dhobis.

Within the walled city there is a semi-segregation in many respects between castes of different status. The dhobis live in separate katras which may include a few households of Kumhars, Khatiks or Malhas (Boatmen) who belong to the same caste strata as the dhobis. The high castes do not live in close physical propinquity to the dhobis. The bhangis may live in the same katra too but this is not usually the case.

Untouchability being a legal offence, the dhobis can enter any temple and the municipality water taps are for everyone's use. But before Independence or even some eight to ten years after 1947 the picture was different. The dhobis had separate wells from which they could draw water. They were not allowed to

use the taps or wells used by the high castes, neither were they allowed to visit the temples of the high castes. There was only one temple built by the khatiks which the dhobis could enter and they used to worship only there. The dhobis also observed pollution from the bhangī. When a sweepress came she could not touch the water tap, but waited till someone filled a bucket of water and threw water for her to start cleaning. Now-a-days such stringent rules are largely disregarded. Though even today there is aversion on the part of the dhobis to washing the clothes of the chamar or bhangī.

Since higher castes do not eat or drink with the dhobis and they themselves observe pollution in respect of the khatik, Chamar or Bhangī—eating and dining is confined within the caste group. The various sub-castes within the dhobi caste as a whole do not ideally observe any taboos with regard to pollution in respect of each other. But for reasons of endogamy and superiority-inferiority complexes the social distance maintained is fairly rigid, and they rarely get together to intermingle and interdine.

Traditionally, the dhobis served as caste functionaries and they still have quasi-hereditary relationships with at least some of their clients who belong to the higher caste. However, the payment is in cash and as far as information goes, has been in cash for a long time. In fact, for an urban population there never had been an agricultural base for payment in grain as was prevalent in village jajmani systems. To quote about the village situation, "The dhobi is a village menial in the sense that he receives a fixed share of the produce in return for washing the clothes of the villages where he performs that office" (*Punjab Tribe and Castes*, p. 239).

There are no symbiotic relationships with other caste groups as such. Relationship on a cash basis, for work got done, is maintained with the 'Bhangii, the 'Nai', the 'Mali' and the 'Pandit'. These functionaries are fixed for the sub-caste and are well known to every member. The 'Bhangī' is given food by the dhobis at the time of marriages amongst the dhobis, as also a cash gift. The 'Mali' or gardner is important at all functions of marriage. He ties the symbolic mango leaves and tinsel paper on the front door of all those households which are closely related to the household where the wedding is taking

place. He is likewise paid in cash and given food.

The "sheheris" say that one pandit caters to the entire sub-caste but I never saw him at the ceremony or otherwise and I believe there is none who is specifically attached to the sub-caste. However a pandit is brought in for few rituals, mainly performance of death service. An important function of the pandit, apart from performing death ceremonies, is to announce the new moon day every month which is observed as a work holiday. The relationship with the pandit is however very slender and in this important aspect they are set apart from other Hindus. The officiating pandit is mostly absent from their weddings, marriages being performed by an elder of the household in a simple manner without the ritual of the chanting of vedic mantras and worship of the nine planets and Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. A joke prevalent among the dhobis regarding their scant use of the services of the 'Pandit' is that God created the dhobi before he created the Pandit. The lack of Sanskritic rituals and the minimal role of the pandit in the life-cycle of low untouchable castes has also been mentioned by other authors including Cohn (1959). Talking about the Chamar, he writes, "As with the majority of lower castes, Chamar's religious life differs markedly from that of the upper castes. Brahmanical Hinduism, as seen from the view point of a village of India, is diffused among the hierarchically marked castes. Very roughly, involvement in and knowledge of the content of the great tradition follows caste lines, with those at the top—Brahmins, Rajputs, and Baniyas—having the greatest involvement and knowledge and those at the bottom—Camar, Dhobis, and Ahirs—having the least" (Cohn, 1959, p. 207). The 'Nai' is ubiquitous and knows as much about the activities and personal histories of everyone in the sub-caste as any member of the sub-caste itself. He is generally a Muslim.

Within the walled city we have different sub-castes of the dhobis. Before 1947, there were four sections of the dhobis, called "thops"—three of these were Hindus namely the Sheheri, Campowale, and Tijoria and the fourth were the Muslim dhobis who comprised a large section. The four "thops" worked and lived together and though they were separate in terms of

marriages and had separate panchayats, at times of emergency or when there was some important matter which a sub-caste panchayat was not able to decide, they would all get together on the banks of the river Jamuna to take a consensual decision. The Muslim dhobis were also included in the communal meetings.

The sheheris and the Muslim dhobis lived together often in the same "Katras"—there are still "Katras" of mixed Hindu and Muslim dhobis in Farash Khana and Matia Mahal. They pay social visits to each other's houses and drink tea etc. together. The religious observances of the sheheris were influenced a great deal by the Muslims. The traditional songs sung by them at weddings have a strong Islamic influence and the language used also has mostly Urdu words. In the content also there are references to "Khuda Baksh" instead of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses like Radha and Krishna. The latter feature quite predominantly in the wedding songs of dhobis, who come from the villages.

Important differences also exist as regards the 'lagan' ceremony of the sheheris and other Hindu dhobis. 'Lagan' is the ceremony where the date of the marriage is fixed. Amongst most Hindus including dhobis, this is done by the Pandit but not amongst sheheris where the elders of the two households (bride's and groom's) get together in the bride's house and decide a date according to convenience. Moreover, the gifts go from the boy's house to the girl's house instead of vice versa as amongst other Hindus. The patron saints of the sheheri dhobis carry Muslim names like Syed, Pir and Ali etc. Many dhobis have little alcoves in their homes dedicated to Syed, which they worship. These alcoves are decorated with strings of flowers, in front of which they light candles or aggarbatties (the Ala). The Muslims do not use earthen lamps. They have great faith in the Pir at Nizamuddin (New Delhi). No marriage can take place unless two goats, one in the bridegroom's name and one in the bride's name is sacrificed for the Pir.

Previously, the sheheri dhobis and Muslim dhobis invited each other to marriages and to a certain extent do so, even today. The wedding card of one of my informants who got married in January 1976 bore several Muslim names where the

names of the persons hosting the wedding were listed. The dropping out of marriage invitation is mainly on the part of the sheheris who do not attend Muslim weddings even though invited. The overt reason given being that in these days of high expenses, it is not possible to invite even one's own kinsmen, so how can one invite others? And if one goes to someone's house one has to reciprocate the invitation. Though covertly this may be part of the overall tendency towards breaking off from the Muslims and integrating with their Hindu 'brothers'.

After partition, with the migration of both Muslim dhobis and Muslim patrons the sheheris found themselves in a predominantly Hindu environment. Instead of the large section of Muslims they now had to cater to mostly Hindus. The sheheris realized the need for Hinduization to cope with these changes, a trend reflected in the fact that a large number of them have now stopped washing the clothes of Muslims. Most of them have also, at least overtly, taken to the worship of Hindu shrines and Gods which they had not done previously including visits to holy places such as Haridwar and Vaishno Devi, pilgrimages unfrequented by them even 15 years back. They also unsuccessfully attempted a merger with another Hindu sub-caste in the city.

Sometime back in 1970-71, there was a talk of the sheheris merging with the other Hindu dhobis for purposes of marriage etc, but the negotiations fell through. The other dhobis accused the sheheris of having cousin marriages like the Muslims; they also levelled the charge that the sheheris had declined to accept the "prasad" at the 'Sat Narain Katha' held to mark the occasion of merging.

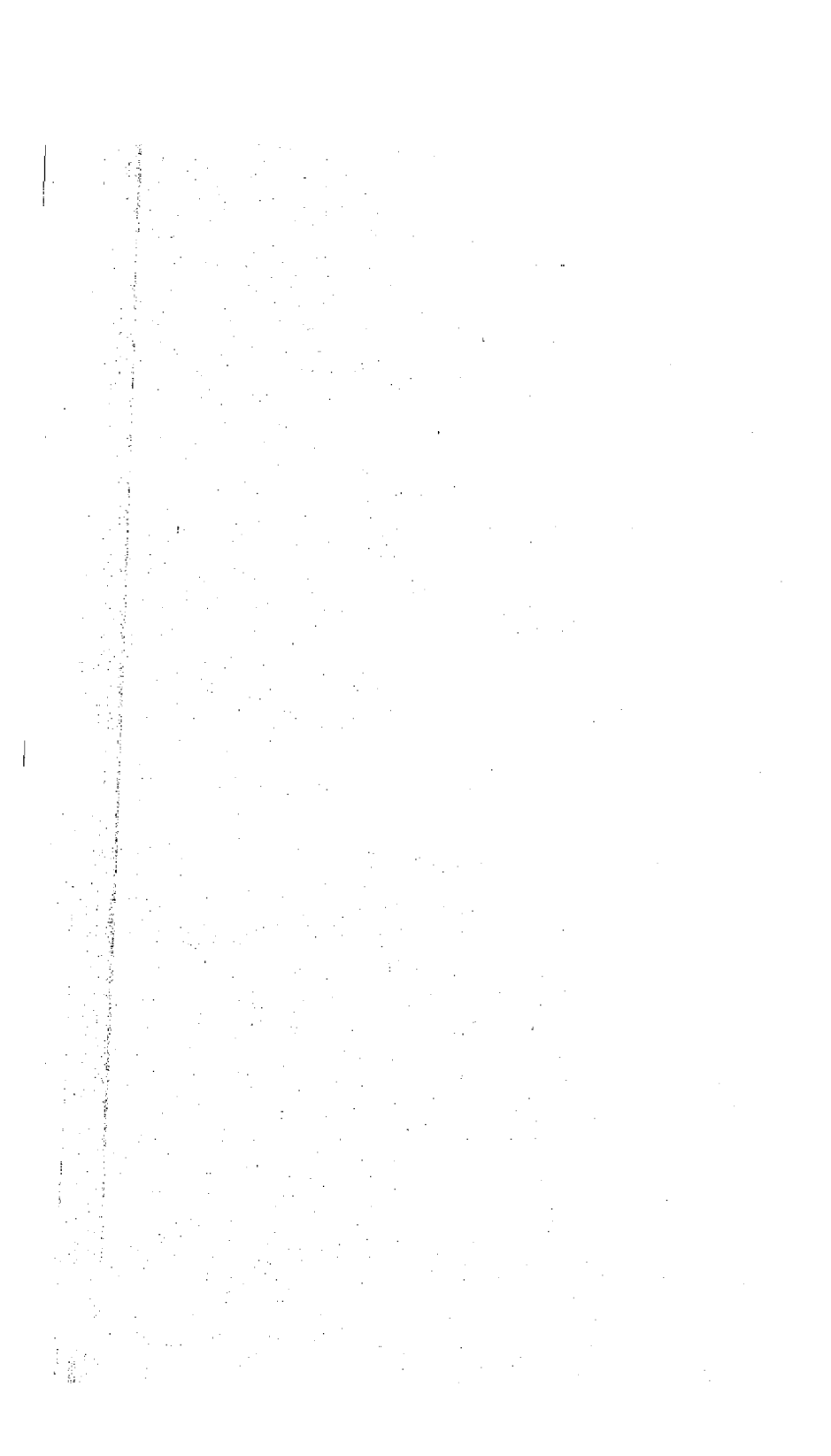
The sheheris on the other hand dismissed the matter by saying that the other dhobis were trying to establish themselves as superior and such an attitude was unacceptable to the sheheris.

The sheheris identify themselves as Kanaujia (as the name suggests, it links them to the famous kingdom of Kanauj) but are denied such a distinction by other dhobis. Similarly the other dhobi sub-castes are identified as 'Campoo' 'Purbia', etc, by the sheheris, each of the latter again identifies itself with the Kanaujia label. When they are required to present a surname like when registering in a school or entering a job they mostly

write Kanaujia, though high caste surnames like 'Verma' 'Sharma' and Arya may also be borrowed. It is to be noted that the label Kanaujia is claimed only by the city dhobis, whether Campowale, Sheheri or Tijoria but not by dhobis who came from the villages. For the latter, in fact, all city dhobis belong to the category of Kanaujia and have similar marriage rules and rites. The village dhobis or "deshbaris" are migrants and look upon the city dhobis as richer and more powerful, at the same time, decrying their non-Hindu characteristics.

The 'sheheris' refer to the other dhobi sub-castes in a derogatory fashion. Likewise the other sub-castes of dhobis look down upon them. Social distance is maintained by the mutual feelings of superiority/inferiority between the sub-castes. The grounds for such feeling are credal but when asked to explain such attitudes, the different sub-castes refer to certain derogatory cultural features in the other group, such as the nomadism of the 'Campoo' who moved around with army camps and the rusticity of the "deshbaris" who hail from the villages of Uttar Pradesh.

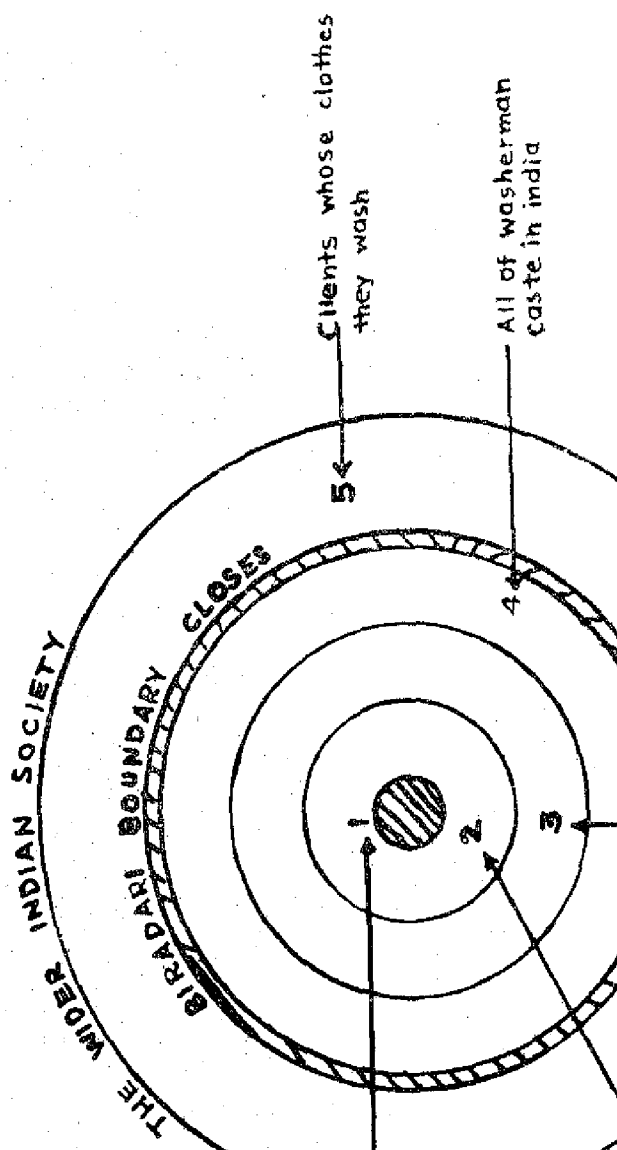


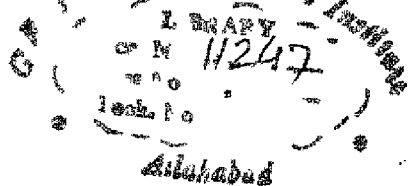


## THE BIRADARI

The term "biradari" conveys not only the sense of a structure but an essence or a feeling, that of identity, belongingness, brotherhood and cooperation. The people of one's own 'biradari' are those with whom one identifies one's self. They may be of one's own caste or sub-caste or those with the same occupation as oneself or those amongst whom one finds a mate. All these criteria may or may not coincide. Though the word used is the same i. e. 'biradari' yet it has several levels of identification. For the 'sheheri dhobis' the widest identification is with all those who have the washerman's hereditary occupation by caste. Therefore it includes both Hindu and Muslim dhobis although from the latter, the former are separated not only by barriers of sub-caste but by fact of religion as well. Nonetheless the culture of this occupation (Channa S. 1975) binds them to each other as against all non-dhobis.

With reference to the general occupational and caste category of the dhobis, they use a number of criterion to set apart one dhobi sub-caste from another. Two important features apart from endogamy that distinguish one dhobi sub-caste from the





other are regional and language differences. The original Delhi dhobis are much closer in terms of identification with each other than with those who come from outside Delhi. The Hindi speaking ones are closer in terms of communication and they are the ones picked for employment by the 'sheheris' if so required. The Bangladesh dhobis who camp on the banks of the Jamuna are treated more or less like outsiders.

The closest identification is with one's own sub-caste, the endogamous group within which one marries and which is more or less geographically localised. For all practical purposes it is this group that is most often referred to as the 'biradari' and amongst which the feelings associated with the 'biradari', namely, identification, belongingness, brotherhood and cooperation, are strongest. This is expressed in the idiom that the men of the 'biradari' are either brothers or sons and women are sisters, daughters and daughters-in-law.

Just like Evans Pritchard's conceptualization of the Nuer society in terms of concentric circles denoting identification at various levels we have also depicted the 'biradari' in terms of concentric circles, each level denoting lesser degrees of identification and dilution of 'biradari' feelings and functions.

In the rest of work, unless otherwise mentioned, the term 'biradari' will refer to the core biradari. The boundaries of the 'biradari' are maintained through endogamy and it functions through economic cooperation between its members and the imposition of informal sanctions by the panchayat. For a large number of his actions and deeds, a dhobi is answerable to the 'biradari' which in turn gives him social anchorage and help and cooperation in times of need. It provides him with his major source of social and economic security. The operation of sub-caste saving societies, the controlling action of the panchayat coupled with practices such as early marriage and the group control on marriage negotiations, all help to reinforce the authority of the 'biradari'.

Cheating and breach of trust within the 'biradari' is prevented by the controlling action of panchayat as well as informal sanctions operating within the 'biradari'. The panchayat is a body of collective representatives of the 'biradari' a kind of collective conscience keeper

Linked with the 'biradari' and panchayat is the institution of the "choudhary" or elder. In all important matters pertaining to the 'biradari' it is the "chaudharies" who play a decisive role. Even in matters relating the biradari to the outside, it is they who serve as linkages e. g. in the meetings of the All India Dhobi Mahasabha. This is a body elected from amongst dhobis from all over India. It has jurisdiction as regards dhobis in all legal, political and social matters. It is the choudharies who take the most active part in the panchayat deliberations and talk to the elected body of office bearers. Whenever the panchayat meets and takes a decision, it is more or less the voice of the choudharies. More often than not, the choudharies are economically well off, socially well connected, having well to do sons and sons-in-law, intelligent and politically shrewd members of the sub-caste. Acceptance of 'biradari' implies acceptance of choudharies as well, for they are inextricably a part of the structure of the 'biradari'.

The 'biradari' also ensures that no dhobi belonging to it goes completely out of work or is reduced to starvation level. At the time of partition in 1947, the Muslim population of Old Delhi migrated to Pakistan and a lot of dhobis who catered to Muslim clients suddenly found themselves without work. Their biradari members helped them with work and gave them some of their own clients to start them off again on their own.

Endogamy, close knit kin networks, essential economic cooperation and the ultimate security offered by the biradari (that a member cannot be allowed to perish without assistance) holds it together against many centrifugal forces like the cultural drifting apart of the educated dhobi youth and diversification of occupation.

Thus the biradari emerges as a security providing status giving body and as the locus of prestige of an individual. It has an existence at the supra-individual level in terms of its value system. It is not merely an agglomeration of individual relationships but a body of commonly shared values, of brotherliness, cooperation, and identification—which is ingrained by individuals through the process of enculturation.

An individual enters by birth into the biradari, grows up into it internalizing its values, learning to conform to its sanctions and in turn initiates his children into it, leaving it only at death. From birth till death, a majority of his activities are, so to say, within the 'biradari'—it provides him with his peer group at all stages of life. It provides him with a marriage partner, an occupation, life long security and most of all, it provides him with a focus on which to anchor himself in society. Whatever an individual dhobi is, he has some reference to his 'biradari'. Once the 'biradari' is taken away from him, he is lost in a web of impersonal relationships which provide him with little ascriptive identity.

The functional operative aspects of the 'biradari' are related to the above stated values. Economic co-operation, which can be achieved only through the feelings of brotherhood and belongingness associated with the 'biradari' is essential for survival, once we take a look at the nature of the dhobi work coupled with his meagre economic resources.

The productive goods that are required for their work are under present economic conditions, quite expensive to acquire and maintain. The maintenance of a bullock e.g. costs them Rs. 10/- a day. A big earthen vessel for washing clothes, costs Rs. 200/- and it costs Rs. 5/- to 15/- in case of minor repairs. To counteract this economic pressure on their purses, they have a system of sharing of production goods. Thus, two or three individuals pool in for the purchase of a bullock or washing vessel and continue to share the cost of its upkeep, and each has the right of user.

Similarly, there is cooperation in watching over each others' clothes, when they are spread out to dry on the banks of the river and in keeping a watch over the furnace fire (bhatti) on which they steam the clothes. A number of men collect and take turns in waking and tending the fire during the night, sometimes whiling away the time drinking alcohol. The banks of the river are strewn with large earthen vessels which have specific owners but which may be used by those who do not possess any such vessels, especially if it is not watching day for the person who owns the vessel. Sometimes if a woman who does not have an able male member to wash clothes for her

comes to the ghat to wash clothes, she is helped by other males on the riverside with the heavier part of the washing.

It is for such reasons of cooperation that dhobis always live in clusters of several households occupying adjacent quarters. Such clusters most often comprise of households of the same sub-caste; for the 'biradari' feelings pervading a sub-caste enable the households to live in close proximity, in harmony and cooperation. Women going out to iron clothes or distribute them to clients leave small children at home to be looked after by neighbours. Even babes in arms are safely taken care of. Houses are kept open in the absence of owners and there is no danger to the belongings. Neighbours make free use of each other's taps and washing places. During the rainy season a person owning a centrifugal drier for drying clothes had all his neighbours drying clothes at his machine. As a result his machine broke down but he could complain only surreptitiously because of the involvement of the 'biradari'.

Neighbourhood ties are particularly important for economic cooperation because it facilitates communication and ensures easier availability of the objects to be shared. This dependence upon others is indicated by the fact that whenever a household moves residence to new locality, others are invited to come and share the accommodation or to occupy neighbouring quarters. Occasionally, an entire neighbourhood may be just extensions of the same family which has split into several households over the generations.

Even the Panchayat functions to provide economic aid and security to its members, apart from functioning as an administrative and judicial body. The panchayat meets every month on New Moon's day and all adult members of the sub-caste are eligible for participation in the panchayat deliberations. But generally the proceedings take the direction which is guided by 'elders' who are supposed to know better. To the dhobis this qualification means a loud voice, assertive personality and a strong kin and friendship circle in the sub-caste.

A collection of Rs. 2/- per month is taken from every household by the panchayat. Only one member of the household (separate hearth) is required to make a contribution. Most often where the father is alive even if the sons have separate hearths,

they do not pay, but let their father take part in the panchayat proceedings for he is still the head of the family. The money collected was previously also used for giving loans at marriage to needy members of the 'biradari', @ 2% per annum interest.

However, most members of the sub-caste find it derogatory to accept a loan from the panchayat for it means acknowledging one's state of poverty before the entire 'biradari', leading to consequent loss of face before fellow members. Most dhobis prefer to accept loans from their clients or even from professional money lenders.

Within the close knit structure of the 'biradari' it is difficult to completely hide one's actual economic status. Even the number of clients possessed by a dhobi are known to others. When a person is poor and has to get a loan from somewhere to carry out a ceremony, it is fairly common knowledge in the 'biradari'. In fact there are very few households which are economically so self-sufficient as to carry out a heavy expenditure without taking a loan. It is paradoxical that no dhobi likes to overtly acknowledge the fact of his poverty before his 'biradari', unless he is so poor that it is impossible for him to hide his state of peniury or he is quite desperate.

Recently, due to some internal squabbles and need to build a temple and adjoining rest house for the sub-caste on the banks of the river Ganges at Garganga, this loan giving has been stopped. The poorer members of the sub-caste feel that this is an intrigue on the part of the well to do members of the 'biradari', most of whom comprise the 'elders' of the panchayat, to cheat them out of their dues. The 'elders' on the other hand feel that by building a temple they would glorify the name of the 'biradari' as well as their own, and that individual interests can be sacrificed to the larger cause of perpetuating the 'biradari' name.

The beneficial aspects of the panchayat are supplemented by its decision making and authoritative role. The panchayat takes decisions on such matters as marriages, adoption and dissolution of engagements and on other disputes between members of the sub-caste. Whenever a marriage is decided upon, information is given to the panchayat which then set the date for the



Any wedding that takes place in the 'biradari' is ideally a matter of participation by all its members. Even about ten years back all the members of the sub-caste including all children, had to be invited to a wedding. Hence overlapping of wedding dates would stand in the way of total 'biradari' participation. Over the years, however, because of the growth of the sub-caste in terms of numbers (number of households of 'biradari' approx 350) and various guest control orders issued by the government, this ideal is becoming more and more difficult to follow. Although weddings are still largely attended, yet, it is not economically possible to invite the entire 'biradari'. With the decline of this practice the rule of holding only a single wedding on any particular day is also slackening. On several occasions more than one wedding has taken place on the same day. However, the dates of weddings are still fixed by the 'panchayat'.

Breaking of engagements and dissolution of marriages are also matters tackled by the panchayat. In case of the former, whichever party takes the initiative in the dissolution has to pay a fine which in the present day is about Rs. 200/- to Rs. 250/-. Marriages, which were earlier totally a 'biradari' affair, with participation by the entire 'biradari', were also dissolved with the consensus of the 'biradari', i.e. by the panchayat. However, now-a-days the younger generation which is conscious of the legal codes of India may go to court to get a legal divorce, though as far as the 'biradari' is concerned this is not considered necessary; the verdict of the panchayat is sufficient.

The panchayat can also impose certain sanctions in case of personal misconduct. In the earlier days it was in the form of prohibiting one from smoking the 'biradari' 'hookah' or drinking water from the pitcher that was kept near the meeting place of the 'panchayat'. This was symbolic of social ostracization and a person who was so penalized was debarred from participating in all 'biradari' activities for a stipulated period of time. Even now-a-days the term used is 'hookah-panni' stopped and implies social outcasting, though the 'hookah' itself has lost its former importance. In case of gross misconduct, like marrying outside the 'biradari', the punishment could be imposed for a life time i.e. the offender thrown out of the 'biradari' for ever. But it is interesting to note here that rarely if ever has any person been

given this punishment. The very strong 'biradari' feelings and the close kinship ties that pervade the sub-caste because of the practice of endogamy usually work against such complete ostracization. Recently, about five years back a dhobi boy had married a Christian girl—they were promptly thrown out of the 'biradari'. After a few months the elders decided to take back the couple, and the couple went through a purification rite. After this the girl was taken to be Hindu and a dhobi and part of the 'biradari'.

Saving societies called lottery also function within the sub-caste; they are a means to individual savings. These operate on the basis that a number of individuals in the sub-caste promise to deposit with a person, a fixed sum of money every month for a fixed period previously decided upon. The amount of the money so pooled may be in the range of Rs. 3000/- to Rs. 5000/-. The monthly instalments deposited by the participants range from Rs. 20/- to Rs. 100/- depending upon the total money and time period of the lottery. With each instalment coming from the members, lots are drawn and the person in whose favour the lot appears gets the entire sum of money. This person is then eliminated for the next draw of lots though he continues to pay his monthly instalments. This way the process continues till all the participants get their money.

The base on which these lotteries operate is faith, trust and a question of keeping face within the 'biradari'. All transactions are by word of mouth and nothing is written down or kept on record. The sanction forcing a person to pay in time and regularly is that of losing face before the 'biradari' and that he has belied faith placed in him. All members of the 'biradari' would condemn his action and may refuse to have social and economic cooperation with him since they cannot depend upon him. Normally a dhobi is not inclined towards thrift or saving. The general tendency is to spend whatever one earns, an aspect of their character indicated by the fact that few have bank balances or insurances, or subscribe to any general mode of saving outside of the 'biradari'. The saving societies thus ensure a minimal of economic security and prevent the distress sale of one's production goods which form the sole capital of most dhobis.

The biradari propagates itself through endogamy hence

marriages are controlled and effected through general pressures and sanctions operative in the biradari ; which is also a kind of extensive kin group because of the cross cutting ties of kinship binding the members. All marriages are settled by the elderly kin. Not only the boy and girl but most often even their parents have no say in the matter – the negotiations being finalised by grand parents or senior uncles and aunts. Both maternal and paternal kin have equal participation in the marriage negotiations and settlements. Boys and girls are engaged at a fairly early age round about 8-10 years for a girl and 12-16 years for a boy. The engagement is known as 'sagai'. It is only a verbal settlement and nothing is given or taken during the transactions. But due to the intensive communication within the sub-caste, the settlement of an engagement is known to everyone, and the parties to it cannot back out, except by formal procedure of the panchayat.

There are not many merits and demerits to be considered during a 'sagai', the only criterion being that the boy should be a few years older than the girl and both should be normally healthy and capable of doing physical work. In fact, it is considered rude to turn down a proposal that has come, which can be extended by either the girl's or the boy's side.

It is also not customary for the boy or girl to formally see each other before marriage though the 'biradari' being small and localized and due to the fact that everyone is invited to all functions, familiarity by sight is not ruled out. But nobody thinks of either negotiating or breaking off a match because of looks.

This is not to say that beauty is not appreciated in the culture. In fact a beautiful person is much admired by everyone around and as a group they pride themselves on their comparatively lighter skins and better features as compared to other dhobi sub-castes. But the economic contribution that a woman makes to her household is of greater importance than good looks. A girl who is known to be industrious and good at ironing clothes is considered much better as a match than a fragile or lazy girl who is beautiful. More important is the fact that one must find a suitable match within the 'biradari' and not a very wide option is available after taking into account the prescribed kin and age

restrictions, a fact that is also reflected in the dowry-less marriage system. These overriding considerations of 'biradari' feelings and economic necessity outplay the otherwise normal appreciation of beauty and economic status. One often finds dark and cross-eyed girls matched with fair and handsome boys and living in a fair degree of harmony.

Marriages outside the 'biradari' into other sub-castes are not deemed to be highly successful, the reason being that the loyalties of a girl from outside are not easily won over. One informant related the failure of a marriage in which he had acted as an intermediary. "A person named Heera came from Agra to look for a groom for his daughter. He approached me and I told him about a suitable boy from our 'biradari'. He saw and liked a boy. We spent a lot of money from our side and the marriage came through. Some sisters of that girl were married into the 'Tijoria' sub-caste in Delhi. She started visiting them and they turned her against her affinal household. There was a lot of conflict. We even begged her parents with folded hands and said that you have spent some money, we have spent even more, let there not be a break up of the marriage, the girl will always be comfortable with regard to food and clothes. But nothing came of it, and so a day was fixed up for meeting in Bazar Sitaram when several well-to-do and educated members of the sub-castes assembled and final decision was taken for dissolution of the marriage. The elders decided that since the girl herself does not want to stay, it was no point trying to force her.

It is not that all the marriages that do take place outside the 'biradari', even though they are very few, are all unsuccessful or unhappy. But that such cases that serve to illustrate the point of view of the conservative sections of the 'biradari' are highlighted and often repeated and held as glaring examples before the younger generations in order to make them subscribe to 'biradari' values.

The young age at which boys and girls are engaged is also an indicator of the efforts to maintain the cohesiveness of the 'biradari'. This eliminates self choice by the boys and girls, a choice which might fall outside the biradari. More often, it is the grand parents or the elder maternal kin who settle a marriage

This system ensures that the authority of elder generation is maintained over the younger generations, a fact that is necessary for the survival of the 'biradari'.

A slackening of authority would imply dissension and break up. Awareness of this fact is demonstrated in the extreme hostility exhibited towards any young couple that dares suggest a love marriage. Even if the marriage is within the 'biradari' and does not endanger the continuity of the 'biradari' it arouses the wrath of the elders. It means that the younger generation is taking decisions independent of the elders and amounts to rebellion against the 'gerontocracy' that otherwise prevails. It is the threat to the authority of the elders that makes them to take a very strict attitude in such situations. One young boy who had married a girl from the 'biradari' out of his own choice said that many elders would like to kill him but are only prevented by his brothers and cousins who belong to the younger generation and are sympathetic towards him.

Of all the marriages recorded from genealogies only seven have taken place outside the 'biradari' and in all of these a girl has been accepted from outside and none has been given in marriage. Three of them are 'sheheri' from Agra i.e. they belong to Agra city in the same way as the 'sheheri' here belong to the city of Delhi. Three of them are Campowale, one from 'Lucknow', one from Ghaziabad, one from Shahdara and one is from Khurja village near Delhi but a Kanaujia. Now even the Campowale and the Agra 'sheheri' call themselves 'Kanaujia' just like the 'sheheris' of Delhi. The link between Campowale and sheheri has already been discussed. Thus even while going out for marriage, some consideration is given to choosing a girl who is at least a Kanaujia. Girls from the villages are rarely liked, especially since their marriage rites and way of life are quite different. Villagers are also considered rustic and poor. Here reference may be made to the shading off of the core biradari concept to the more diffuse biradari as indicated in the diagram (p. 30). It also makes clear the fact that choice, if it is to fall outside the core 'biradari', would fall within the next level of identification.

Sometimes the reason for marrying outside the 'biradari' also lies in the fact that there being few educated and rich families

the children of such families, which may be just one or two in a sub-caste, find it difficult to find suitable matches within the 'biradari'. The brother of a rich tyre merchant, who is a 'sheheri' dhobi was married to a girl from Lucknow who is a Campowale but educated up to M.A. His own son has been married to an uneducated girl belonging to an ordinary dhobi family from his own sub-caste.

The father of an educated boy expressed his willingness to marry his son to a girl outside the dhobi sub-caste, if she is suitable, but the uncle of the same boy retorted that it would only create problems because the dhobi in-laws would expect the girl to iron clothes like other members of the household and one cannot expect a non-dhobi girl to be proficient in ironing clothes. Marriage outside the dhobi caste was only possible if the members of the household were able to change their ideas about the work expected from a woman.

On the whole the trends towards marriage outside the sub-caste is very limited and the thrust is coming mainly from the educated boys employed in non-traditional jobs who are interested in educated brides. In none of the cases the desire has actually materialized and most boys are yet content with uneducated brides from their own 'biradari'. Any girl from a caste lower than them would not be acceptable even to the dhobis. Marriage is possible only to a girl belonging to other sub-castes within the dhobi caste group. Even here it is believed that there are greater chances of conflict and at least one is on record where the girl was from Agra.

There is greater reluctance to give a girl outside the 'biradari' because in this case everyone would ask "what was wrong with the girl that she could not get a boy from within the biradari?" Moreover, there is apprehension about sending a girl to a distant place, for then she would be cut off from her relatives and being illiterate, as most dhobi girls are, she will not be able to communicate to her people, through writing letters.

Today there is a certain degree of crystallization of progressive and conservative elements within the 'biradari'. A dispute that arose regarding the building of a temple has split the 'biradari' into two factions. All the cohesiveness of the biradari does not imply that enmity jealousy and factionalism are absent among

dhobis.

Such feelings are generally suppressed at the time of economic needs and cooperation but come to the fore at ritual occasions like weddings and religious celebrations, which are often scenes of drunken brawls and individual fighting. Sabotaging of engagements may be a method of taking revenge on an enemy but cooperation and help in work may not be withdrawn. Only in extreme cases of conflict do neighbours stop talking to each other and withdraw cooperation in work as the cases of two neighbours who quarrelled during the festival of Holi. As a result, one of them threw a bucket of boiling water over the other, scalding him seriously. But the matter was not taken to the police and neighbours intervened to settle the affair. The members of the two households stopped talking to each other. Such enmity, whenever it occurs, continues till the households find it difficult to get along without each other's cooperation. This is likely if they are living in close proximity, in which case a solution to the problem is sought with the help of elders and well wishers belonging to the 'biradari'.

At the present moment two kinds of developments are threatening the 'biradari'. One of them, which has to do with factionalism within the 'biradari' is only a process of organizational change which does not affect the principles on which the 'biradari' is founded. It is rather a part of the historical process by which the biradari has split again and again into smaller units over time, but each of the separated units has retained the characteristics of a core 'biradari'.

The second type of development has to do with forces of change which threaten the very foundation on which the 'biradari' stands. They challenge the principles and the values which form the 'biradari' and as such are a real danger to its existence.

With reference to the first kind of process, already referred to as the dispute over building of a resthouse which has split the 'biradari' into two factions, is actually a crystallization of the progressive and conservative elements within the 'biradari'. The panchayat as already stated had decided to build a rest house at Garganga. Some dhobis were sent to look up a suitable plot of land they gave the advance and bought the land near the

river Ganga at Garganga, 75 kilometers from Delhi. When they came back, however, there was discontent among the other dhobis; some said that they had paid too much money, some said that they should have built one nearer home on the banks of the river Jamuna where they already had a piece of land. On the plot of land near the river Ganga the Ganga Dharamshala has been built, it was given the name of Dhobi Dharamshala—many said that the name *sheheri* should have been added since it was their money after all. A break away group was formed which has now started building another temple and rest house on the banks of the river Jamuna.

More fundamental latent differences however surfaced during this dispute, something more than a mere dispute over the location of a rest house. The 'Ganga' group, the one which had favoured the building on the banks of the Ganga, comprised of the more traditional minded dhobis. The Jamuna group consisted of the reformists, the more educated and the well-to-do members of the sub-caste. The most significant step pushed through the panchayat by the Jamuna group was the abolition of drinking liquor at marriages and social occasions and general condemnation of drinking alcohol. This is not to say that the elders of the Jamuna group do not drink liquor, but the overt stand taken is probably a reflection on their adaptability to the wider political atmosphere of the country and greater awareness. The 'choudhary' who had presided over the earlier panchayat and who belongs to one of the most progressive households (son has a drycleaning shop) was with the Jamuna group.

There had earlier been simmering discontent among the poorer sections of the dhobis against the rich 'choudharies'. Allegations were made that they had been usurping the panchayat funds. Taking this opportunity many of them broke away and formed a new panchayat. The 'biradari', however, is still functioning as a whole. The close kin network makes it as yet impossible to form two completely separate discrete units, for members of one group are all closely related to members of the other group. Social interaction is still unaffected and rivalry is limited to the panchayat level, apart from arguing out when people meet, which in any case rarely becomes heated. The course this factionalism will take is not yet apparent. Even if it divides the *biradari*



into two endogamous groups, it will be in tune with the earlier mentioned fissiparous tendencies present in the dhobi 'biradaris', which have split again and again into smaller endogamous groups, historically over time.

The second process has begun with the introduction of education and widening cognition, especially of the younger generations. Some of them have now started challenging the overall authority or even validity of the 'panchayat' and consequently that of the 'choudharies'. Most well informed members of the sub-caste, whether educated or uneducated, old or young, are becoming politically conscious and aware of the fact that as citizens of India they have a wider identification outside the 'biradari' and a 'choudhary' is not the last word in terms of authority. Resorting to the courts and the police instead of going to the panchayat is but one reflection of such awareness. Some people openly flaunt the authority of the choudharies and some young men even deny their existence. However, still the overall atmosphere is of conformity rather than deviance.

Although it is the core 'biradari' that normally and most often and successfully operates as a security giving body and is the locus of an individual's prestige and status, yet the outer levels are also operative and serve to influence an individual's behaviour. Therefore the actual boundaries of the biradari should be seen as closed at different levels.

This is exemplified by the behaviour at the washing ghats where help and cooperation is extended to all dhobis, whether of one's own core 'biradari' or not. Moreover whenever a decision involves any issue that affects dhobis at a level of the biradari higher than the core endogamous group, then there is a unity of all dhobis at that level, in order to take action. For example if there is an issue that is likely to affect dhobis washing on the Jamuna Ghat, then all dhobis belonging to Old Delhi, who wash on these ghats would unite to attack the issue.

The unity of the 'biradari' at a higher level of identification can be illustrated through the narrative of a Muslim dhobi, belonging to Old Delhi. "There is nothing greater than the 'biradari'. I was going in my cart when a cycle-rickshaw came and bumped into me, we were only two of us, father and son, while a number of cycle rickshaw men collected on the spot. They

were getting the better of the situation when another dhobi came on the spot, a Hindu. We then picked up courage. The rickshaw men started asking for money. I told him to tie the rickshaw to the cart and that I will get it repaired. In the meantime two more dhobis came and then two more. We were seven in strength. By this time two 'baniyas' also arrived on the scene. They asked me what the row was about, so I told them. The "Lalas" told the rickshaw wallah, that we were 'dhobis' and he will not be able to match our strength. That if he wanted he could tie the rickshaw to the cart and get it repaired but if he really wanted his well-being, he should quietly take the rickshaw and get away from the place. The rickshaw-wallah quietly went away and did not even get his rickshaw repaired. Where there is unity there is a lot of strength."

The All India Dhobi Mahasabha came into being in 1953. The main issue that united dhobis from all parts of India was a film 'Rami Dhoban'. Some politically active dhobis took exception to the adding of the prefix dhoban to the proper name Rami. A countrywide agitation of the dhobis was launched and as a consequence of this, the All India federation of dhobis came into being. Actually this was the resultant of the working of nationwide social forces. With the democratization of the country in 1947, political atmosphere became competitive (given the traditional Indian set up) this crystallized groups and factions, each of whom tried to push their group interests through organized vote banks on caste lines. Caste and religion became positive political factors. It was only in such a milieu that caste became an ideological uniting force for all dhobis in India who were earlier divided into regional and local groups.

However, the 'biradari' at the local level remains most powerful, since for them most problems are local and not Pan-Indian, the higher bodies have at best an amorphous existence. The All India Dhobi Mahasabha, apart from the 'Rami Dhoban' agitation has crystallized at the All India level only occasionally. Once in 1958 a very large demonstration of dhobis from all parts of India took place to press forward a charter that included such demands like supply of water at subsidized rates, removal of tax on thelas etc. Each of these demands had universal applicability for all dhobis. Another demand that is currently being

pushed by the All India body is to bring all dhobis all over the country under scheduled castes including the Muslim dhobis. Till today in some states of India like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal, Delhi, etc. the dhobis are included amongst scheduled castes while in other states like Punjab and Haryana, they are not. Similarly the Muslims, not being part of a Hindu caste system, are not included.

The sheheri dhobis themselves make no distinction between Hindu and Muslim dhobis as not being part of the same general occupational caste category. The religious difference of the Muslim dhobis is seen only as secondary to their occupational status.

The All India Dhobi Mahasabha recognizes seven subsections of dhobis i.e. representatives of these seven sub sections meet at all the general body meetings—these are sheheri (includes all dhobis resident of Old Delhi), Muslims, Marwari, Campowale, Maharathi, Bundeale and Kanaujia. The sheheri dhobis locally recognize four sub-sections of all those who traditionally belonged to Old Delhi before partition in 1947. They are the sheheri proper, the Agrawale, the Tijoria and the Muslims—the Compo-wale, who are an offshoot of the sheheris are also included. Whenever there is any crisis involving the local dhobis, all these five sections unite to form a common panchayat which is normally held on the banks of the river Jamuna. They have met for pushing forward such issues as stopping the release of sewage water into the Jamuna, which makes the water dirty and unfit for washing purposes ; for the abolition of 'thela' tax (which was levied after 1947), against the grazing of cattle on land where they dry their clothes (for the cattle eat and destroy the clothes) etc.

The acceptance of Muslim characteristics by the sheheri dhobis, like worshiping Muslim saints and relating Muslim folk lore and singing songs heavily sprinkled with Urdu words as also close social interaction with the Muslims which only stops short of commensality, is explained when we see how close the local Muslim dhobis are to the sheheri in terms of biradari configuration.

In fact they are closer than other Hindu dhobis who do not belong traditionally to Old Delhi. There is cultural y a greater

difference between the local Hindu dhobis and the non-local Hindu dhobis, than between the local Hindu dhobis and the local Muslim dhobis. Thus, 'biradari' is a close correlate of occupation and physical propinquity.



## THE ACTOR

In an earlier chapter we have talked in terms of the 'biradari' as a holistic entity, however, even though we abstract the concept 'biradari' as a supra-individual entity, in the ultimate analysis, the 'biradari' is made up of individuals and is sustained by individual actions. There is however a two-way dynamism between the individual and the 'biradari'. However much, an individual is an individual, having his own idiosyncratic personality and personal ambitions and goals, he is also conditioned and circumscribed by the cultural milieu in which he is placed and the social organization of which he is a part. 'The choices of the individual must always be limited by the resources of his society and the values of his culture' (Herskovits, 1952, p. 8).

It is for this reason that for any culture, especially one as close knit and socially circumscribed as the dhobis, we are able to identify something about the individuals belonging to a culture that is characteristic. We are able to say that there is something that makes a dhobi a dhobi. We are also able to abstract a typical life-way—a number of elements that are common to the upbringing and passage of a dhobi through life

However though the biradari still retains its overall frame-

work and the dhobis still remain dhobis. occupationally and otherwise, the situation is not static or free from changing influences. As has been shown very well by Firth in *'Social Change in Tikopia'*, the first impact of change on any community is in changes in the 'structure of expectations'. In other words traditional goals or wants give way to a new series of expectations regarding newly acquired goals and wants. These wants, that an individual has, are linked up with the enculturation and value system inculcated in him through his traditional upbringing and are partly influenced by the impingement of the wider society. In fact most studies of change have indicated, similar to Firth, that before actual organizational or structural changes take place in society they are preceded by a change in the spectra of wants pursued by members of that society i.e. aspirations change first and action follows.

To quote from Belshaw's work on Fiji, "Economic growth must be based on the assumption that gap of significant dimensions exists between the goals actually achieved in a society and values adopted in that society.... Almost all underdeveloped societies in the contemporary world, of which Fiji is one, have major unsatisfied aspirations which affect at least part of the population... but the second term in the proposition is that the persons concerned are prepared to act to achieve the potential wants, bringing them into effectiveness as goals" (Belshaw, 1964, p. 271).

In this chapter we shall discuss the dhobis as individuals who grow up into a cultural milieu and are enculturated into a way of life, value system and as a result they have certain wants and aspirations. Changes in aspirations are partly responsible for the changing patterns of choice that individuals make within the socio-cultural limitations placed on them and within the structure of opportunities presented to them.

### **Growing up in the traditional culture**

The initial life experiences condition the actor into growing up into a particular kind of adult. In this section we describe the process of enculturation that a dhobi undergoes in the traditional milieu.

There has been little change in the actual mode of upbringing of a child over the years. The picture as it exists today is similar,

with small variation, to that as existed thirty or forty years back.

The birth of a child, whether male or female, is welcomed by the dhobis. A child is a gift of God, to be useful to its parents and cherished as a loved one. Couples who do not have children are looked upon with pity. They consider themselves unfortunate. If childless for many years after marriage, they take to adoption. At least one male child is considered necessary to continue the lineage and if a couple have no hope of begetting a male heir they adopt one. There is no case of a childless household. Normally dhobi women are fertile and adoption is not necessary but in one or two cases where there was no male child in the household, a boy was adopted. Adoption is always done from within the 'biradari'. One couple has five daughters living and five daughters who died in infancy but yet hope to beget a son. But female children are equally welcome and parents without a daughter pine for one. If the first child is a daughter she becomes the favourite of the father or of the grandfather if he is around. Even otherwise female children are much loved and petted by male relatives, brothers and uncles. One often sees middle aged or elderly males sporting with little girls, daughters or grand-daughters, after a hard day's work. If a little girl is crying the father-in-law may chide the daughter-in-law for not looking after her. Little boys are also petted and loved, the youngest child, boy or girl, is generally the favourite but there is a marked preference for little girls.

All babies are breast-fed and bottle-feeding is almost unknown. At least up to the age of one, a child is brought up only on mother's milk, the mother feeding it as often as after every half an hour. There is no forcible weaning and children often continue to breast feed up to the age of two or two and a half. The youngest child continues to breast feed the longest because no other child comes to take its place; for often a mother stops feeding a child only when the next one comes.

There is no conscious effort to discipline a small child. Children keep hanging around their mothers coming to their saris as they work. Neither is there any effort to inculcate a child into



continues up to the age of two and half and more to exist mainly on mother's milk and a few morsels or bits of food, often rice and 'daal'. When a child is old enough to eat and it cries, its mother may place a handful of rice and 'daal' in front of it or hand it a piece of 'roti' or biscuit. Children fall into the habit of eating bits and pieces all through the day instead of eating regularly. There are no fixed meal times either. Most mothers feel that a child should not be given solid foods till it is more than one year old and that solid food upsets a child's stomach. Since the mother has neither time nor the knowledge to prepare separate food for her child and the normal food prepared for adults is highly spiced and unfit for a child's digestion, there is some basis for such belief. Moreover they are not able to provide fruits or other expensive items like eggs, etc. for their children. Mother's milk is considered indispensable for a child and given as long as it wants to feed. A child leaves the breast when it itself takes to solids.

Children are given small change like 10 paise or five paise bits to go and eat something from the street-vendors like sweets or pea-nuts. This is a regular feature and has been continuing for a long time. Children approach not only their parents but even elder brothers, sisters and uncles for money. The amount given to a child varies according to its age and the degree of favour harboured towards it by the elder whom it approaches. An old woman about seventy-five years of age recalled that she being the eldest daughter and a favourite of her grand-mother received two paise as compared to the one paisa received by her younger brothers and sisters and with which she got enough 'rabri' to fill her stomach. Giving of money to children is a convenient method adopted by adults to remove them for sometime, especially when the workload is too heavy. Getting money develops into a habit and younger children soon start copying their elder brothers and sisters in asking for money. One man said, indicating his one year old son that he has already started asking for money. There were no instances of children saving their money in piggy banks. They go out and spend the money as soon as they get it and mostly on eating.

Apart from breast feeding a mother has little time to spare for a baby. Often a baby keeps crying while its mother finishes the

work at hand only then attends to it. A baby may cry for as long as 10 to 15 minutes before its mother has time for it or there is someone else at hand to look after it. Children are picked up and engaged in play and often given their baths and dressed by the older children in the household. The very large numbers of children coupled with the busy work schedule of the mother which includes ironing clothes and helping in washing and drying of clothes etc. in addition to normal household duties also does not make it possible for a mother to give her children any special attention. Though the eldest and the youngest children are favoured as compared with others. Small babies may be picked up and carried on the hip by the mother, while she is working though most of the time it would be the older sibling who would do that. After weaning a child is left more or less on its own and plays around with the other children or solitarily till about the age of five when it gradually starts imitating its elders in work. Children of about five may be seen helping their mothers in cleaning grain or in other light work or looking after or picking up their baby brothers and sisters. Only recently, and that too in the comparatively well to do households are children provided with toys to play with. Most often they play around with sticks and stones or whatever they can lay their hands on.

Children of more than five or six also start accompanying their parents to the 'ghat' if they go there to wash clothes. They play about in sand and look after the clothes. Small children of about the age of seven or eight may be asked to bring things from the market. Girls at this age start washing utensils, taking full care of younger children, sweeping floors and helping their mothers fill the iron with coal and children of both sexes fetch and carry. Boys may be put to school at this age.

Up to this age a child is rarely scolded or beaten though it may be shouted at or given a whack occasionally if it is making nuisance of itself or getting in the way. But it is not disciplined for irregularity in eating habits or toilet training etc. Children develop the habit of doing what they want whenever they want and for this reason most children must find the discipline of the school hard to cope with.

Men may use abusive language towards male children though

not towards female ones. We scolded all the children of both sexes. At times we scolded or expressing anger when directed towards small children.

**Initiation into adult work.** Children start with the easier difficult tasks. By the age of of the adult work and is capable of household work although she meal independently. She is not given very expensive or matures earlier than a boy at the age of fifteen or sixteen. Her clothes requires full adult takes a longer time to master children are encouraged to sex. For example a boy when he sat down to cut members of the household. no young girls to help the boys may be asked to do utensils or sweeping floors.

A ninety year old man "In our household we addition to my parents. dhobi's work. They tried they did not study and were beaten and persuaded a lot towards studies and used my parents came to know all.

"I was the eldest of the school. As soon as I was my father at the Jamuna. find my way to the river. Mahal—distance of this used to prepare the 'rotis' carry to the riverside. M used to carry his lunch lat

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not towards female ones. Women use abusive language towards children of both sexes. At times such language is used not for scolding or expressing anger but as form of affection especially when directed towards small babies.

Initiation into adult work is gradual and comes naturally. Children start with the easier work gradually working up to the difficult tasks. By the age of eleven or twelve a girl learns most of the adult work and is capable of taking on responsibility for household work although she may not be able to cook the whole meal independently. She irons clothes, though initially she is not given very expensive or difficult clothes to iron. A girl matures earlier than a boy who may not take on adult work till the age of fifteen or sixteen. This is because the washing of clothes requires full adult strength as well as the intricate process takes a longer time to master. In the initial socialization the children are encouraged to learn tasks appropriate to their own sex. For example a boy was one day given a severe scolding when he sat down to cut vegetables along with some women members of the household. But in a household where there are no young girls to help the adult female in household tasks even boys may be asked to do primarily girlish tasks like washing utensils or sweeping floors.

A ninety year old man narrated—

"In our household we were four brothers and three sisters in addition to my parents. Both my mother and my father did dhobi's work. They tried to educate two of my brothers but they did not study and were put into dhobi's work. They were beaten and persuaded a lot to study but they had no inclination towards studies and used to play during school time. Later on my parents came to know that they were not going to school at all.

"I was the eldest of the three brothers and was never put into school. As soon as I was old enough I started taking lunch to my father at the Jamuna. I was eleven years old when I could find my way to the river. The place of residence was at Matia Mahal—distance of this place to river is 3 kms. So my mother used to prepare the 'rotis' which I would put on my head and carry to the riverside. My father used to go away early and I used to carry his lunch later.

"On the bank of the river all the work that I did was that my father would hold two ends of any long cloth while I would hold the other two ends and help him spread them on the ground. As I grew older he would give me small clothes to wash. I would wash them and beat them and in this way I learnt the traditional work. By the age of thirteen I learnt the entire process of washing. When I started going with my father to his clients, he would tell them that I was his son, that they should give me money as well as clothes for washing at whatever time I came to them. I used to tie up the clothes in bundle, put them on my head, come back home and tell my father the number of clothes I had brought.

"At that time for one rupee you could get 16 seer (15 kg) of flour. 'Ghee' was pure. Then, like today we used to eat 'roti' for one meal and rice for the other.... In those days my father used to give me two paise to go and eat 'puris' from the market. There were big candies (Rabri), only two of which could fill the stomach. In those days the paisa was 'big'—one or two paise were given to us which used to be sufficient for our wants. Whenever I felt hungry I would ask for one paisa of which I ate 'puris' and 'laddu', to fill my stomach to capacity. Unlike today we had no interest in going to movies or going around with friends. There was no variety in clothes. We used to wear 'dhoti' and 'kurta'. At the most one could wear clothes of striped cloth which was in fashion those days. Every one wore similar kind of clothes...."

### **Excerpt from Life History of a Woman Aged about 80 Years**

"When I was nine year old, I was married. Before that I played around and looked after my younger brother and sister. In our household I and my brother were grown up while we had one baby sister. I used to keep sitting on the swing with her in my lap. For one paisa I used to get sweets and peanuts. My mother used to give me money. I never saw my grand-parents. My father had died and my mother was living with her HyB. I was her great favourite but God ruined my life and even my mother died. My uncle (FyB) got me married at the age of nine. I had never done any work till then since I was very young, only nine years old and had only played with my brothers and sisters.

After my marriage I used to go to my in-laws' house crying and used to come back crying. I was born in Chilli Quabar and married at Sitaram Bazar (distance 2 km.). Ten days I would stay there and then spend one month in my natal household.

"I never covered my head or my face like a married woman but ran around just like any other child. I had my mother-in-law, father-in-law, HeB and HeBW. They used to treat me with affection. When I used to spoil something they would beat me but at the other instance considering me a child love me as well. My mother-in-law used to beat me. She would ask me to do some work but since I had never done any work I was not able to do it properly, when I used to spoil it she would beat me. Later on she would repent and pet me. I had two small sisters-in-law (HyZ) but no (HyB) brother-in-law. After my marriage, four sons were born to my mother-in-law, out of which two are still alive and two are dead.

"I refused to do any household work. One day my father-in-law said, 'Come, you do not work at home, I will take you to the ghat'. On reaching the ghat the only work I did was to spoil everything. In those days, tags were attached to expensive clothes to mark them. I and my sister-in-law (HyZ) plucked out all the tags from the clothes and then rubbed them all over with green slime from the riverside. My father-in-law struck his forehead and told my sister-in-law (HyZ) that he will drown her in the river Jamuna and told me he will separate me from the household.

"As punishment for my naughtiness (I and my husband) were then made to set up separate household. For four or five days we remained hungry. We stayed in a small room near the in-laws' house. For five days we ran hither and thither not knowing where to go? Whom to ask for food? Who would feed us? When we could no longer bear the hunger my husband bought one rupee worth of grain. Those were days of famine and only four kg of grain was weighed for 1 rupee. Otherwise we had bought grain weighing 40 kg for one and half rupee or two rupees—but when we separated we got only 4 kg for 1 rupee.

"At that time I even did not know how to cook. There was an old dhobi living with us. He used to beat me and teach me how to cook. Then I would make small cakes of dough and

cook them, gradually in one or two months I learnt how to make 'rotis'. At that time I was only ten or eleven years old. There was no danger in living separately because everyone used to live nearby and the entire 'katra' used to be full.

"My husband used to do dhobi's work. He knew the work because he was fully grown-up. He was some five or seven years older than me. At that time I did not help him. Only when I grew older that I started helping him with washing. I used then to go to the 'ghat', help him spread out the clothes and dry them, carry his food to the 'ghat'. Then I would come back home and prepare the next meal and then iron clothes and go and distribute them. When I started doing all this I was about twelve or thirteen years of age ..."

#### **Excerpt from Life History of a Woman about 22 years of Age**

"I was born in Sitaram Bazar. In my childhood I had mother, father, brothers, sisters, everyone in the household. I never played much but started working from a very early age. Ever since I was very young, all I knew was work and work. At first I started to bring small items from the market. As I grew up I started cooking. Then I would help my father with the washing. Later on I went to the 'ghat' to help spread the clothes and to dry them. After coming back from the 'ghat' I used to prepare the meals. I used to cook and at the same time iron clothes. This became my daily routine and day in and day out I would do all this.

"Then one of my sisters got married and the burden of the entire household fell on me. My mother was also there but she used to go to iron clothes and distribute them to clients. She used to do more work outside the house. I used to spend most of my time inside the house and thus the entire responsibility for running the household was given to me. I was only fourteen or fifteen years of age when I carried everything on my own shoulders.

"Then one of my brothers got married, I did all the work for his wedding. My sister-in-law came into the household. Some work she knew, some work she did not know. Some work she learnt on her own and some I taught her. Then another of my brothers got married and another sister-in-law came. Then my



sisters-in-law started having babies. Then onwards I left the household work to my sisters-in-law and spent most of my time looking after the children. When I had time to spare I would go out into the neighbourhood and talk to my friends.

"The household expenditures were all in my hands, right after my elder sister got married. I used to bring the provisions also. I would go to the shop, get the coupon, give the money, put the sugar in the bag and carry it home. My brother would follow me on his cycle and carry the grain sack. I would clean the grain at home and ask my brother to go and get it ground from the grinder. Like this I used to carry on the household duties till I got married at the age of eighteen...."

A male child is generally under the authority of its father and maintains affective relationship with its mother while it is vice versa for a female child. The parents have greater desire to control the male child rather than the female child. Since girls are kept confined to the house and married at fairly early ages the parents feel less danger of their getting spoilt or getting disobedient but a boy has great likelihoods of becoming wayward, especially since he spends a lot of his time outside the house whether he is studying or working.

Boys may be given severe beatings for making mistakes in their work, not going to school, or losing or spoiling something. Once there was a commotion in the neighbourhood, I saw a man severely beating up a boy of about ten years of age. His mother was watching but made no attempts of any kind of interference or succour. The beating was very severe and the father had worked himself up into a hysterical frenzy. Several other men were trying to pacify him and rescue the boy and only with great difficulty were they able to prevent him from throwing the boy into a large tub of water. Later on I asked the boy's mother about the reason for such a beating and she told me that the boy had lost a rupee coin that his father had given him to get something from the market.

Even grown up sons are kept in place or at least an attempt is made to keep them in place as long as they form part of the same hearth as their father. While I was filling the schedules, few sons dared to open their mouths in front of their father and even if they did, the father would often snub them and ask them

to keep quiet. Behind their parents' back, the children, especially teen-aged and older ones, would defy them and express distaste for their parents' way of life.

Unlike a father, a mother holds little authority over grown up sons, in fact once a son is grown up and earning, a mother regards him as knowing more about the ways of the world than herself. Though a mother may ask her son to do something it is often in the form of a request rather than an order. The son may even reprimand the mother for not doing something in the proper way. Teenaged daughters however come directly under the authority of their mothers. A father feels shy to rebuke or abuse a grown up daughter, a daughter being considered grown up when she reaches the age of twelve. A girl above the age of twelve is rarely allowed to go out of the house and into the street alone.

Elder siblings exercise a fair degree of authority over the younger ones irrespective of sex. An elder brother may rebuke a younger sister or order her to do something. An elder sister has greater authority over her younger brothers and sisters, especially if she is in charge of running the household. The tie of affection between brothers and sisters is also intense. Other relatives like FeB, FyB, FeZ, FyZ, FF and FM have authority over the children, at times almost equal to that of the parents. The maternal kin have a more affective relationship and seldom stand in the position of authority.

An important aspect of growing up amongst the dhobis is learning to drink alcoholic beverages. There is no fixed age or ceremony to initiate a boy into drinking but most persons pick it up from kin or friends. According to a woman aged 35 years, "My grand father (FF) used to drink a lot of liquor. I was his great favourite because I was the eldest of my sisters and looked like my FZ. After my FZ got married my grandfather thought that I replaced her. Whenever he used to drink I would go and sit near him. He used to drink himself and give me a little to drink from his bottle—in this way I started drinking and got into the habit. When I grew up I used to drink on every festival and gala occasions. After marriage I continued to drink.

"My grandfather was a heavy drinker, my father also drank. To show their affection they would give me a little to drink. My

father did not drink much but when one sits with one's kin on any occasion one has to drink."

According to a 60-year-old woman, "the first time I started to drink was after my marriage. My father used to love me very much but while I was unmarried he would not give me a drop to drink. After my marriage when I went back to my natal household for the first time, my father opened the bottle. I was scared to drink at first, not knowing how it would taste, but my father forced me to drink. I never drank while I was unmarried but after coming to the affinal household, when the women got together the men would give them a bottle, saying that it was the daughter-in-law's share. They used to try and break the reserve of the newly married girl so that later on she could drink along with the other women members of the household."

The traditionally accepted mode of initiation of a woman to liquor is at a ceremony called 'Lagan' which takes place one or two days before the wedding ceremony and which signifies that girl now belongs to her husband and affinal household. The date of marriage is fixed on this day. From the boy's side the boy's FZH or ZH comes with gifts for the bride which consist of yellow clothes (pilia) which are worn till the wedding ceremony is over and a silver necklace (hansli) along with some dried fruits. The women of the natal household of the bride gather around her and sing songs and drink from a bottle of liquor. The bride-to-be is also made to drink a few drops of liquor at this time.

### **Becoming an Adult**

The transition from adolescence to an adult is a combination of several processes. For women, marriage is the threshold of adulthood but for a man though marriage is what establishes him as a householder, it does not give him full status in terms of independent decision making and authority. Due to the ideas of gerontocracy prevailing within the 'biradari', the members of a man's patrilineage always have some influence on the decisions that an individual makes in his life, and these include not only a man's father or grandfather but also such patrilineal relatives as father's brothers and father's father's brothers.

As a child a person can take practically no important decision

except what to do with his time, whether to work or play, in which also he is almost totally under the authority of his parents and older siblings who can make him dance around to their orders. What he is going to wear and what he is going to eat are also dependent on the wishes of the person who controls the household expenditures, which may be parents, mother or elder sister. Children may however be asked as a form of indulgence by adults as to what they would like to eat ?

In the adolescent age, boys, as already explained, move somewhat out of the orbit of authority of their mothers but they still remain totally under their father's influence. However as a boy gets better initiated into his father's work his economic contribution becomes more and more and sometimes, if the father considers the son deserving, he may allow him some degree of economic freedom, like allowing him to handle a few clients on his own and also keeping part of the remuneration as pin money to spend on clothes, food and entertainment. Such allowance is almost never made before a son becomes at least 14-16 years old, only at which age he is deemed fit to handle some money on his own. Before this age, even those boys who are working on jobs and apprenticeships are expected to hand over all their earnings to their parents and if they manage to keep back some, it is entirely without overt knowledge of their parents.

Non-earning sons are never given much money to spend, except some kind of minimal allowance for travelling etc, if they are studying in school. When a boy becomes educated enough to join college, however, his status changes. His father and mother and even other members of the kin group and of 'biradari' accord him some minimal respect, though as we have already shown in the earlier chapter on Biradari, there is a transference of prestige to his father rather than to him. However within his household he gets some decision making role like in the decisions to educate his younger siblings, in the kind of clothes that he wears and the friends that he has. For an uneducated youth, economic contribution to the household is a yardstick for measuring status. But for both educated and non-educated earning sons, the latitude allowed for decision making is only marginal and in most important matters it is the older members of the household who take the decisions. Any untoward liberties that even a grown up or

very personal, decision making is in practical terms a matter of concern for everyone in the household and kin group. Any couple who fail to bear a child within the first year of marriage become the target of much tongue wagging and open banter within the peer group. One educated dhobi youth narrated that he had not intended to have a child before three years of marriage, but after one year had passed all his friends of his peer group within the 'biradari' started pestering him with their jokes and ridicule, going to the extent of calling him an eunuch. He had a child immediately. Any woman having a tubectomy operation done and the number of children, dead or alive in any household, is a matter of common knowledge within the 'biradari'.

Only after he has separated his household for purposes of work and consumption that a man and his wife get full decision making roles in matters of their own household's work and consumption. A man is independent at this stage to make decisions regarding his work, clients, change of occupation, education of his children, the size of his family, the standard of living and what goods he buys or sells. He becomes an adult in the eyes of his parents who no longer exert authority on him in matters of day to day decision making.

However in crucial matters involving vital social relationships, such as engagements, marriage, adoption, divorce and disputes with members of the 'biradari', they come under the jurisdiction of the elders of the family and via their medium, of the 'biradari' itself. By the unwritten codes of the 'biradari' no man has greater authority than his elders ; so whatever matters are vital to the 'biradari' are to be decided by the elders.

The elders themselves, belonging to the 'biradari', are circumscribed by its value and norms. Hence a dhobi becomes an adult within the 'biradari', and through the 'biradari' to be a member of the society.

The values internalized by him in the process of growing up determine what kind of decision making adult he becomes. Such that even in such matters in which, as an adult, he gains full independent decision making roles such as choice of occupation, daily consumption pattern, organization of household work, decisions regarding size of family education of children saving

and entrepreneurship : he exhibits behaviour which can be shown to be circumscribed by the values which have been inculcated in him through the process of socialization and reaffirmed through the sanctions operating in the 'biradari' and to which, as a person born and brought up within the 'biradari' he is subjected to conformance.

### **Being a Woman**

Being a woman amongst the dhobis means a life of hard work and transition from a happy and carefree childhood to responsibilities of a married life, usually burdened with a large number of children. Though all girls do a lot of work in their parents household the atmosphere of doing work is different in one's natal household and in one's affinal household—at least for the initial period of marriage. Excerpt from life history of a 35 years old woman will serve to illustrate the qualitative difference. "As a young child I did not do any work. My grand parents (FF & FM) used to love me very much. Nobody ever beat me. I used to play the whole day and eat whenever I felt hungry. As I grew older I learnt to work from my parents. I learnt how to cook, clean utensils and sweep floors. Some work I learnt from my parents and some from my grandparents. As I grew older I bought things from the market. I would bring whatever I liked and cook it. The household money was given to me to keep. My father or mother never told me to cook or not to cook anything. I would prepare whatever I felt like and they would eat it happily. My parents would bring the money from the clients and give it to me and if any client came to our house I would take the money from him and keep it. My brother was at that time unmarried ; then he got married and my sister-in-law came into the household. Even then my parents would give the money in my hands and not to her. As long as I was in the household I carried out all household expenditures, it was only after my marriage that my sister-in-law took over....

"Then as I grew up, my grandfather (FF) wanted to get me married, the negotiations for my marriage were carried out by my FF and my FeB. My parents said that whatever was the liking of the elders was their liking too. Before my engagement I did not know my in-laws but after the ceremony I started

knowing them and I would hide whenever I saw anyone from my affinal household. Now-a-days the girls would come up and stand right in front, but I used to feel shy and hide myself.

When I got married I cried because I was happy in my natal household. I had no worries, I used to eat and drink according to my liking. After marriage I did not know what would happen, whether I would be happy or unhappy? The bridegroom came on a mare and there were lights and a music band. My father had prepared 'rice' and 'daal' with 'ghee' and brown sugar. The entire 'biradari' feasted at our house as well as the bridegroom's house. At their house the feast took place one day after the wedding, when they brought me to their house. While everyone was feasting, I went and sat in a separate place....

"My father gave me good jewellery. He gave silver ornaments for the ears, neck and arms and for my husband he gave a pair of ear rings and a finger ring. I also got 20-25 utensils. There was no custom of giving furniture like there is now-a-days....

"I had no mother-in-law, only my sister-in-law was there (HeBW). The day to day household expenditures were carried on by my husband and heavier expenditures were done by my HeB. Sometimes my father-in-law would also do it. Nobody gave me money after I got married and I also never asked for it. When I was newly married and even when I had one or two children I never talked much in the house, and I never asked for money. I also never went to the client to collect money.

"Two days after my marriage I started doing household work. The clothes had been washed in the 'bhatti' before the marriage and two days later my HeBW told me to light the iron and start ironing the clothes and I started. Then she asked me to cook and I started cooking. My husband would sometime ask me to do some work and I would do it.

"I was married fifteen days before the 26th of January and on the next 26th of January I gave birth to a son. There was a lot of merry making and 'gole makhane' were prepared and everyone from my natal as well as affinal household collected together. There was a lot of drinking and singing of songs. In all I had eight children out of which only five survived.

"We lived together in the affinal household for two or three years after my marriage after which our households separated

There was fight between my husband and his elder brother in the matter of work. My husband is short tempered and if there was any delay in completing the work he would start fighting or if there was delay in preparing a meal, there would be a fight.. We continued to live under the same roof, even the 'chullah' was the same, only that one of us would prepare the food first and the other one later. The separation was only of expenditures.

"After our households separated my husband started bringing home the money and giving it to me and I started carrying on household expenditures. Now my sons also earn and come home and give me their earnings."

Though a newly married bride remains in fear of her in-laws and obeys her mother-in-law there is no actual ill-treatment of a daughter-in-law.

No case of positive ill-treatment has ever been recorded. The dowry being of no consequence, it matters little whether a girl brings a lot or less. The only significance is that the women gossip about the items that have come. A woman during the initial phase of her marriage visits her natal household often and gradually the visits become less frequent as she gets involved in household work and children. The visits paid by the women are more a function of the workload than any restrictions placed by her in-laws. But the work itself is heavy enough to tie her down to her own house.

One woman told me that she being the youngest of her brothers and sisters was the favourite of everyone and spent such a care-free childhood that few persons in her natal household or in its neighbourhood believed that she would be able to take on the responsibilities of married life successfully. But today she is the mother of four children and manages all the affairs of her nuclear household. She is so busy that she rarely gets time to visit her natal household. The last time she visited them was two months back and her sisters-in-law have since been sending anxious messages for her to come and visit them.

Women, like the men, develop a capacity for very prolonged and strenuous work. Small girls from the age of nine or ten can pick up the heavy irons which weigh 10-12 kg. They also learn to light fires and fill irons with hot coals with dexterity. How-



ever, the preoccupation of women with the ironing of clothes, and helping in washing etc. deprives them of skill in other feminine household activities like stitching and knitting or even looking after children. Most dhobi children wear an unwashed and neglected appearance with grimy faces, dirty clothes and matted hair. There is also a high infant mortality rate. A woman's duties as mother are limited to giving birth to and breast feeding a baby. For the rest children are 'expected' to grow up on their own. Survival of children is left as a matter in the hands of God. One woman above the age of hundred recalled that she had eighteen deliveries. "I had eight sons and six daughters surviving, out of which some went young (died), some went after growing up. Now I have only one son and two daughters living. The rest all God gave and then took back. I married off nine of them. My first born was a daughter, who died at the age of eighteen". All this was related without much show of emotion.

Child birth is regarded as a natural phenomenon and not a matter of much concern. Only recently women are being given medical attention during pregnancy and childbirth in some households. A few of the babies were born in hospitals. In each case the mother spent about seven days in hospital before coming back home, but this was much talked about and acclaimed as a rare event. The common practice is for childbirth to take place at home with the help of a midwife who is not medically trained but is a low caste woman who has experience in assisting childbirth. Women continue to do all regular work right up to advanced stages of pregnancy, in fact almost till the time of confinement.

One day at 5-50 p.m. in the evening a woman who was eight months pregnant came back from the Jamuna ghat some 3.5 kilometres away, she had walked all the way, to and fro and had left the house at 8 a.m. after taking her morning meal. From that time she had been helping to spread and dry the clothes and had not eaten anything.

A woman may not work for seven or ten days after childbirth though in most cases if she is not particularly sick she may start ironing clothes three days after childbirth, though she may not enter the kitchen so soon. According to a 60-year old informant, 'I had eleven children in each childbirth I was assisted by my

mother-in-law's sister and a midwife belonging to a low-caste (Julah). The same midwife attended to all my confinements. God forbid no doctor ever came to attend to me and neither to my daughter-in-law. Once a baby is three days old we have our bath and start doing normal work. In one case I had my baby in the evening and at night resumed the ironing of clothes. This was not the case for my first child. While my mother-in-law was alive I did not do any work for ten or twelve days after childbirth. My mother-in-law used to cook for me. She used to give me 'gole makhane'. I did not drink any milk during pregnancy, only in the morning tea I would add an extra quantity of milk. In the morning I would eat 'daal' and vegetables like everyone else while in the evening my mother-in-law would boil some bones etc. for me to eat."

Over the years, and especially with the recent emphasis on family planning, a number of dhobis belonging to the younger generation are realizing the necessity for limiting the family as well as taking better care of children born. For this reason some of them are sending their women to hospitals for delivery as well as getting tubectomy operation done, mostly after four or five children (I have not yet come across any who had it done before three children). More significantly the younger generation of mothers want to give more attention to their children than was traditionally expected of them. This gives rise to some conflict within the household since the older members especially the mother-in-law wants the daughter-in-law to spend more time on household duties and ironing of clothes than in looking after the baby like giving it bath or feeding it on time. In a nuclear household if the husband is doing traditional work then the woman cannot spare much time for her children because she must assist in the traditional work. An excerpt from the life history of a 22 year old woman living in a joint household shows this—"at the birth of my child (a boy) I was happy as well as sad because with his birth my responsibilities increased. I was sad because my husband does not have a job (he has done his B.A.) and I was worried about the added expenses of the child. Part of the expenses of his medicines etc. I bring from my natal household and part of the expenses are borne by my affinal household. From the day of his birth I have been able because he has

been sick ever since his birth. If he remains sick it is almost like I am sick myself, for his misery is my misery. Sometimes he gets fever, sometimes diarrhoea, sometimes cough and sometimes cold. Everyday I have to bring medicine for him. Just the day before he was in a very bad condition so I took him to hospital (Kalawati Saran Hospital) and I stayed one day and one night in the hospital with him. I gave him only my own milk till three months after which I have started giving him bottle feeds also. Sometimes I give him daal and rice, sometimes biscuit, sometimes vegetables and 'chapatti'. 'Daal' and 'rice' I gave him everyday. Milk in bottle, I give three times, morning, afternoon and evening and he takes two solid meals during the day. He has only now started eating a little solid food (the child is one year old) Early morning I give him a bottle feed and after two or three hours if he cries I give him my own milk. Then the children take him out to play and in the afternoon I again give him milk. Then he keeps playing. I give him a bath every day. My husband assists me in looking after the baby. In fact he looks after him more than me, he gives him bath, takes him for walks, boils his milk and feeds him. I have to iron 100-150 clothes in a day. If I warm my iron at seven in the morning, sometimes I extinguish it at eleven O'clock at night, sometimes at nine, sometimes at ten—never before nine O'clock. The whole day I must iron clothes otherwise the household will loose its clients. You cannot stop this work no matter what happens. Whether you look after your child or not you must iron clothes.

If it was in my hands I would never let him cry and never neglect him. When I am working and he starts crying I have to ask someone to take him outside—I would fill a bottle with milk and ask someone to feed him or give him something to play with and again resume my ironing. If I leave my work then my mother-in-law would abuse me.... When I was not married I used to work according to my liking. I could start when I liked and stop when I liked. Now I cannot leave work even if I have a headache or fever. Even during my menstruation I have to continue to stand and iron clothes. During this period I leave cooking for two or three days—ask my sister-in-laws to do the cooking but I cannot stop ironing

"I do not think about the future—unless he (my child) remains well what can I plan about the future? When he will be five or six years old we will put him into school. I want to start looking after him just after I get up in the morning. I want to feed him and give him a bath and let him play afterwards. But this is not possible because if I start bathing him in the morning my mother-in-law would say that I am bathing him to shirk other work. I have to finish household duties before I can look after my child.

"I realise that my child does not get any of the looking after that he needs. If my husband was not helping me to look after him even this much would not have been possible. But even for this my in-laws object, they say that I give my share of the work to my husband, that a father is not expected to look after his child—to bathe or feed it."

Another woman, about 35 years of age, with six children lamented that if Smt. Indira Gandhi had enforced family planning programmes earlier she would not have had so many children and would have been able to take care of them much better had they been fewer.

A woman's merits are not traditionally measured in terms of her efficiency as a mother or housewife but in terms of her ability to iron clothes, both qualitatively as well as quantitatively. A woman who can iron a large number of clothes and do them well is looked upon with admiration and respect. She commands a more respectful position within the household. Often such a woman dominates other members of the household if she is above middle age and with grown up children.

Women are recognized as economic assets to the household and that is why they are entrusted with a large share of the responsibility of running a household. It is the younger woman rather than the older one in the household who is in charge of the kitchen and monetary accounts. This is because the elder women, the mother and mother-in-law with age and experience develop a much greater skill at ironing of clothes and it is more profitable that she spend a greater amount of her time in ironing than on household duties. It is for this reason that even young unmarried girls from the ages of twelve or thirteen may be entrusted with the running of a household. The young daughter-

in-law as soon as she enters her affinal household starts off on household duties just one or two days after the wedding. A mother with two sons expressed grief at not having a daughter. She has already paid several visits to the shrine of Vaishno-Devi in the hope of getting a baby girl. Another woman who has had her tubectomy operation done after three children—two boys and a girl—said that she would have had the operation after two children if her daughter had been born right after her first son, rather than after two sons because a daughter is a must for a household.

Female children are welcomed, for they are of infinite help to their parents especially the mother. Women are also equal partners to men and rarely is a dhobi woman suppressed by her husband. She talks and moves freely and although the women veil their faces and do not speak directly to their HeB and HF they are otherwise emancipated in their actions. They speak freely to their husbands even in the presence of other members of the household—though they do not engage in general conversation with him openly. A woman is not supposed to call her husband directly by name. Though this norm may be broken—at least in one instance a woman related that she was going with her husband when while crossing a street she lagged behind. Her husband walking ahead of her did not realise that she had strayed behind. So she had no means of drawing his attention then to call him aloud by name. The husband registered surprise but did not admonish her. The woman herself expressed no embarrassment at having called her husband by his first name (a taboo for all Hindu women) but added that in times of emergency one must not think of norms but of the situation at hand. Women also address their husband by the familiar 'tu' rather than the respectful 'aap'. Though the husband is the ideological head of the household his wife influences him in his actions and planning and before doing anything important a man always consults his wife. If a husband does something not to her liking a woman freely shows her resentment or anger and often the man has to eat the humble pie. Even though men get drunk and enter into brawls, it is a serious offence to beat up one's wife and if any such event occurs the matter is taken up before the Panchayat and a fine levied and there are cries of 'shame' 'shame' in the

entire 'biradari'.

The economic value of the woman may at times be perceived and used to advantage by her natal household. In one case a boy who is a graduate and recently employed in government service has been engaged for several years to a girl. The household of the boy consists of his elderly parents and younger brothers and sisters. His mother is an expert at ironing clothes and spends most of her time in that occupation. His sisters though very young, about eight, ten years old are forced to take on a large share of the household duties like cooking and looking after the baby. In such a situation the eldest daughter-in-law would be a welcome addition to the household for then she could take on household responsibilities and assist her mother-in-law in ironing. The boy's side has been trying to bring about an early marriage but the girl's household is steadily dodging them and trying to make profit out of the situation. At first they had put forward the condition that the boy should get a job but now that he has secured a job they want an interest free loan of rupees ten thousand. The boy's parents have agreed to forward a sum of rupees seven thousand but the girl's side are adamant on the rupees ten thousand.

The situation clearly indicates the individual's capacity to perceive and manipulate a situation to his advantage within the culturally circumscribed field of action. The girl's parents in this case are taking obvious advantage, not only of the economic value of their daughter but also of the fact of the 'biradari', in so much as it is difficult to get alternate spouses within the limited range of choice available from girls of suitable age group—not violating prescribed kin categories from within the 'biradari'.

### Values and Aspirations

As has become quite apparent from the life histories quoted in this chapter, although the process of enculturation has remained more or less unaltered over the generations, the aspirational pattern is undergoing a change and the conservative nature of culture is serving to create gap between aspirations and realizations.

Traditionally, the dhobi of some thirty years back was a more satisfied individual than the young man of today. He lived in a

city that had far less glamour than the busy metropolitan capital of today. There were few fashions in clothes and much less variety of fabrics to choose from. Food was cheap in relation to incomes and prices of other goods. Work was in plenty and most dhobis found sufficient work and earnings to lead a comfortable life, by their own definition which implied merely two full meals a day and liquor. (This was also partly related to the small size of families due to higher rate of infant mortality). There was no hankering after variety in consumption.

The idea of a good life centered around earning one's bread, honesty and being in one's own specialized trade. A man was happy if he was well occupied in his work and took pride in his handiwork. A house meant only a roof over one's head and a good neighbourhood and living conditions were where one lived with one's fellow 'biradari' and kin. A man's proud possession was his bullock and a man's merits lay in his good physique and capacity for hard work.

One's field of reference was limited to one's 'biradari'. It was unthinkable to emulate the way of life of persons outside one's 'biradari'. Respect within the 'biradari' was earned by one's capacity to do hard work. Since work was in plenty and there was no dearth of clients, one's earnings were in proportion to one's physical capacity and skill in the traditional occupation.

Community life, 'biradari' and the comaraderie at the washing ghats on the banks of the river Jamuna, were the chief sources of entertainment. All members were invited to celebrations of rites-de-passage in the 'biradari' and such occasions were looked forward to and enjoyed by everyone. The food served on such occasions was simple—but the enjoyment lay not in the quality of food, but in the togetherness and in the singing and dancing, aided by free flowing liquor.

One of the chief modes of entertainment in the 'biradari' in the pre-independence era was the arrangements of bull fights on the banks of the Jamuna. These were arranged on a New Moon day, when all dhobis assembled. Gambling was enjoyed by most men and a number of them were addicted to it, especially as they approached middle or old age. In fact, as the capacity for physical work became less and less, and a man could put in less hours of active work his inclination towards

leisure time activities such as smoking, drinking or gambling increased. Leisure, being a rare commodity, was much valued, but able bodied dhobis do not like leisure in the absence of hard work. Men relaxed by smoking hookahs. In the early days when the work load was heavy, a dhobi would put on even two or three bhattis a week, which meant he would be working round the clock for the entire week. But once he had done enough work and felt that he had earned enough to last him a few days, he would sit idle for one or two days and just sleep and relax.

Planning for the future was not part of the dhobi's outlook on life. The 'biradari' was thought to be the continuity of social life and emotional and physical security were centered in the continuity of 'biradari' and participation in its activities. One's kin and neighbours were there to tide over a bad day and help in times of distress. Men made provisions for the future, not by saving and building up resources, but by strengthening 'biradari' ties and building up on kin and neighbourhood relations.

When a man had some savings he would spend it on a good meal and drinks. Kin and friends visiting them were invited to share the household meal and if the visitor was of special importance like a son-in-law then a bottle was opened for him.

With the passage of time the traditional mode of upbringing, as already mentioned, has remained unchanged and so has the basic personality of the dhobi and his fundamental value orientations. Though the quality of life has changed to a certain extent, the emphasis is still on enjoyment and largely on the day-to-day, existential type of living, with little thought for individual savings for the future. Qualitatively a dhobi has not changed much. He still likes to have a drink when he can and a good meal when he can manage. Frugality and puritanism is not his cup of tea. The easy up-bringing of childhood with not much emphasis on regularity or discipline makes the dhobi inclined towards irregularity and any kind of enforced discipline makes him uncomfortable. To a large extent this is one of the reasons why dhobi children are misfits in school and most of them express a desire to run away from school. On the other hand they are quite successful in work involving physical labour



Without undergoing changes in basic value orientation, however, the changing scene all around him imbues in him a desire for possessing of a larger number of goods than his fathers before him. Both materially as well as socially his aspirations have changed considerably since the pre-independence days.

Gone is the contented feelings of yesteryears. A young man is no longer satisfied with a clean white kurta to wear. He must have shirts and trousers (western style) of expensive fabrics tailored in the latest fashions in order to feel that he is presentable. He must have the latest hair style fashioned after the currently popular matinee idol.

A woman must have cosmetics and stylish artificial jewellery in addition to the old fashioned silver jewellery passed down to her from her mother or mother-in-law. She must have several sarees with matching blouses and petticoats. Young persons are lured by the multiple cinema halls in the city. The movies are no longer frequented by delinquents but even married women feel neglected if their husbands do not take them out to the movies.

The dhobi household which was previously furnished only with a wooden table for ironing now feels the need for sofa sets, cots, tables and chairs for at least the purpose of display if not for use. Utensils, which were heavy, useful and made of durable brass have been supplemented by the fragile, expensive and much less useful china cups and saucers, plates and glasses, which must be displayed conspicuously in every household of some status, even though they may be used only occasionally. Alarm clocks, wrist watches, radios, transistors and television sets have all found their way slowly and gradually into the dhobis' houses. Previously the only steed of the dhobi was his bullock to which the cart was added on after 1947 when the Municipal Corporation started to object to heavy loads being put on the backs of the bullocks. Now a days the maintenance of the bullock becoming quite expensive, it has been replaced by the bicycle.

Food items have become varied. Even earlier the dhobi enjoyed a good meal but the idea of a good meal was conventional and limited to a few choice items like rice and meat, ghee and brown sugar. Today there are hundreds of food items in

the market which a traditional dhobi had never heard of but which his son and daughter-in-law would like to eat. One middle aged dhobi woman remarked that she hears of her sons going out and eating 'dosa' but she has never seen one in her whole life. Old people often lamented about the tendency on the part of their children to eat choice tit bits from the bazaar.

On the whole there seems no limit to the material objects especially items of food and clothing to which the present generation aspire. There is an ever growing demand for eating better food, wearing better clothes and living under better conditions.

Social aspirations have also been affected by the forces of change but the referent for them still lies within the 'biradari'. This is because the dhobis are still on the lower rungs of the ladder in the terms of economic achievements and if they do not suffer from caste discriminations the class barriers of the newly developing society are still operative to keep them from participating in the social circles of the elites. Their level of achievement will have to go up very high for them to be eligible for status in the wider society. In the present state of affairs the best they can do is to look for position and status within the 'biradari'.

The criteria for gaining status even within the 'biradari' has however undergone change. The capacity to earn more is no longer limited to hard work and skill in the traditional occupation. Education and access to non-traditional occupations have opened up better sources of income and status is associated with a good job—the kind that is done by the upper classes, preferably one that requires education. Within the achievement scale of the dhobis a white collared job commands respect. A successful businessman even though uneducated demands respect because of his economic achievement. Money is the new status symbol and one which tends to override a large number of other failings.

However, the economic status of an individual is not to be judged by his bank balance alone (of which most dhobis have little knowledge) or his style of living, which within the traditional mode of living standards does not allow for great variations but by the pomp and show by which an individual

conducts the gala occasions such as marriage, birth of son in his household etc. and which is then witnessed by a large section of the 'biradari'.

In fact this new concept of status has given rise to a steep increase in the gift giving at the time of marriages and other occasions and even in the number of such occasions. Those who profess a more modern outlook have started celebrating the birthdays of their children in imitation of the upper grades of society—something that was unheard of even ten years back.

Status within the 'biradari' implies that a man is treated with respect as he moves within the 'biradari'. He is offered a better place to sit in and food is served to him properly at a feast. He has greater say in the matters of the panchayat and called upon as intermediary in fights and disputes and his opinion is generally acceptable to all.

However such powers and status considerations are not sufficient to satisfy many dhobis, especially of the younger and educated set who would like some status in the wider society in which they are placed. Moreover, as already mentioned, position within the 'biradari' is also a matter of age—gerontracacy being the rule. Since acquisition of status through economic achievements is a far flung goal for most dhobis, they have started looking towards political activity as a means to achievement. There is considerable degree of political consciousness among them and several youths were engaged in active political work during the elections held in 1977. Several of them are self styled social workers and there is at least one youth society which is a social service society, started by some dhobi youths, along with their friends from other castes. One of the brothers of a rich tyre merchant of the dhobi 'biradari' wanted to stand for elections during the 1977 polling for the post of MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly). Such participation gives them an identity in the wider society outside their 'biradari' and a feeling of importance associated with it.

But and large the 'biradari' is an important part of the dhobi life. To achieve prestige and position within the 'biradari' is a goal to which most dhobis aspire—the means to this goal are several—the first one being a conspicuously high standard of living (the word conspicuous being very important) for as already

mentioned actual personal comfort is often sacrificed for the sake of items of display. Education and a good job implying a white collar job is another means to the goal though this is also the means to satisfying one's personal ambitions like better working conditions, an easier life and better food and clothes. Though an educated individual especially one who has a well paid job elevates not only his own status but even that of his household in the eyes of 'biradari', yet a job alone is not sufficient to command respect. It must be complemented with a show of ostentatious living, showy clothes, display of furniture in the house, a high expense on liquor and most important of all lavishly conducted ceremonies where the 'biradari' is involved—this is notable in contrast to the simplicity by which celebration of religious festivals is carried out. Supporting evidence is the fact that those households that have educated their sons are also the ones to go in for pomp and show in celebrations even though the boys in question may not be employed. But it is felt by the members of that particular household that since they have already climbed up one rung of the social ladder they should not stay behind in another respect but should rather work towards reinforcing their social position.

Social position is a matter not of individual achievement but of achievement of the household and even of other kin and affines. The greater the achievement, the wider the circle of kin who derive prestige from it, until the whole biradari may be proud of successful members. It is noteworthy that all the households that are connected to a successful household derive a kind of pride through that connection and try to live up to the image by spending more on conspicuous consumption, putting their children in school etc. Since the money spent on any household function like marriage, death etc. is contributed by all the members of the household and kin, well to do connections obviously imply that the gifts would be more lavish and hence the overall standard of celebrations would go up.

However, even though social prestige and position especially within the 'biradari' is a coveted goal a person's personal ambitions like better food, better clothes and better living conditions are also wants that are worthy of being considered as goals—a coveted goal is to earn one's living through the pursuit of the so

called respectable jobs which are comfortable, do not require manual labour but more importantly are also pursued by those belonging to upper castes and classes of society. These jobs do not have any label or stigma attached to them and one who is employed in them is not ostracised as a low caste or lowly member of society but is capable of being absorbed into the wider and more impersonal networks. Most persons belonging to the younger generations feel themselves to be social outcasts because of the lowly status of the occupation or group (caste) in which they have been born. One of the ambitions that many of them harbour is to climb out so high as to leave behind their parental social status completely. However, this ambition is more of wishful thinking than any realisable goal for few of them actually think that they are capable of climbing up so high.

The most realisable goal is to get a fair amount of education which may not be up to post-graduate level, but which is capable of fetching them a salaried job (made easier by the job reservations for scheduled castes) and to live in fair degree of comfort—though as already mentioned, the dhobi's have their own measures of assessment of what is to be called a good standard of living. What is more important to note here is the fact that for the dhobis the path to fulfilment of personal ambition and deriving social prestige within the 'biradari' are complementary rather than contradictory to each other. A person gains status through factors of education and salaried jobs which also provide him means to fulfil his individual wants.

The individuals goals being still pursued with the 'biradari' as the referent, makes the gap between aspiration and achievement much less than if the individual has the limitless goals of the wider society as his achievement mark. The kind of satisfaction that is derived from enhancement of prestige within the 'biradari' and which is gotten from even limited achievement (such as is within means of the dhobis) reduces deprivation and also slows down the rate of change, if we accept Belshaw's correlations between change and the gap between aspiration and achievement as quoted in the beginning of this chapter.

More significant in matter of change is such change as may predictably come about if the cultural values of the dhobis change. Such values especially [regarding the bringing up and

enculturation of children may fundamentally affect the ideals of the traditional occupation and 'biradari'. Some young parents of today do not want to enculturate their children into the traditional mode of occupation. They want to educate them, bring them up like children of the urban middle class, not doing any traditional work at home. Since they do not want to use the labour resources of children either in traditional or in non-traditional occupation, there is also a tendency to go in for family planning and limit the number of children to three or four (the dhobi concept of a very small family). However, the number of such parents is as yet very few, consisting mostly of such fathers as who are educated (there are as yet no educated mothers) and the pressures on such parents to conform to traditional patterns are considerable—as clearly illustrated in the life history of a 22 year old woman quoted earlier.

In the next sections we describe the basic processes of the economic organisation of the dhobis and show how the actor manifests himself in economic behaviour.

## PRODUCTION

Some of the important definitions of production given by economists as well as economic anthropologists are as follows; "purposeful alteration and combination of physical material till it reaches some desired empirical state" (Udy, 1959 p. 2); 'Totality of operations that supply a society with its material means of subsistence' (Godelier, 1967, p. 254); "the process by which the members of a society appropriate and transform natural resources to satisfy their needs and wants" (Cook, 1973, p. 814). Production has generally been conceived of as an activity that serves to create something capable of further utilization and which involves transformation of some kind in the materials used or in a process of direct appropriation. The washing of clothes, however, is a service, which does not involve the creation of any new form, it is only a process of transformation of dirty clothes into clean ones. It is neither appropriation (hunting, food gathering, fishing etc.) nor construction, nor manufacturing.

However, like all other recognized productive activities it has its tools techniques and work organization and the productive system is capable of being analysed as a management

system working by the operations of individual choices circumscribed by given constraints. In order to analyze the washing of clothes as an economically productive activity we must take into account the problem of economically productive and non-productive labour.

The problem and the various views on it has been adequately summarized by Scott Cook (1973, p. 840-842). In short, the problem with regard to all such activities, (like the washing of clothes) which are not creating any new forms and neither making available already existing forms for utilization is, whether such activities are to be considered productive labour or kept aside as unproductive labour not worthy of economic analysis? Neoclassical economists, even while emphasizing utility rather than things as the objective of productive activities, have expressed divergent views on, whether "form" utility or "space", "time" and "possession" utility (Knight, 1965; p. 49-50) are in fact "productive".

Following the latter mode of thought (i.e. consideration of "space", "time" and "possession utility") which widens the definition of productive labour considerably, the following question from Cook's definition serves well to define cloth washing for payment as (economically) 'productive' activity.

"Those performances are economic, or have economic aspects which entail the production, transfer or utilization, directly or indirectly, of material goods with use or exchange value as well as those performances that involve the transfer or utilization of services, remunerated in cash or kind, for the purpose of satisfying wants and/or contributing to subsistence.

Systematically applied, this formula enables the analyst to handle within a common analytical framework both materially productive activities (labour) and activities that render services but do not yield material products so long as they elicit remuneration for kind" (Cook, 1973. p. 842).

Cook includes the services of a Presbsterian minister in preaching a sermon and the performance by an Apache shaman within the range of productive activities.... "They have in essence performed ritual services with economic aspects, their performances are within the economic field of analysis but are simultaneously internal to the religious ceremonial field of the



cultural system" (ibid).

At this point another dimension of analysis has to be clarified. Here we are analysing a productive system and not the total economic structure of which it is a part. This is an important point to be considered, because the characteristics of the dhobi productive system may be quite different from the overall systems into which it is articulated. A similar point has been made by Scott Cook, "In this connection I am describing aspects of the social relations of metate production, not how the metate makers as a productive group within the village and regional division of labour, relate to other groups... work organization, in this case relations among metate makers, is but one dimension of these social relations, by which our metate makers are joined in interaction with the land owning agriculturists, the store keepers, the money lenders and so on" (Cook, 1973, p 811).

The characteristics of the specific productive system like that of the dhobis, may remain unchanged even when its relationships as a group to others in the outer economic network changes. Thus while the earlier, 'jajmani' type of relationships gave way to the more impersonal pragmatically economic types of relationships with their clients, the productive system, with its tools, technology and work organization remained the same.

Moreover, the characteristics of the dhobi productive system which is based on a household division of labour, simple technology and tools has several similarities to what Marshall Sahlins (1973, p. 74) calls the Domestic Mode of Production (DMP), but the society as a whole, of which the dhobis are but one group, has characteristics of a different economic system altogether—complex, monetized largely capitalistic.

In the following three sections, we shall discuss the three major aspects of the dhobi productive systems, (a) resources—such as are needed in the process of production, their availability, systems of sharing, inheritance and credit; (b) technology and the technical process; and (c) the organization of work.

### Resources

Of the essential capital goods required for carrying out the traditional occupation 'ghat' (a place for washing clothes) and

water were traditionally what can be labelled as 'free goods'. The water of river Jamuna was available for all and no payments in any form were required. Flat slabs of stone on the banks served as beating platforms for the clothes. But due to the industrialization of the city of Delhi and its surroundings, the vast amount of industrial waste flowing into the river, coupled with the city sewage which is also released into it, has made the water of the river Jamuna very dirty. Washing clothes in the river also requires that a person stand knee deep in the water and be subject to all the vagaries of weather and the open sky overhead.

Transportation of clothes to the riverside involves a greater amount of labour. Further, the labour of the members of the household is more, for someone has to go and give the lunch on the banks of the river to the person who is washing as well as help in drying and keeping watch over the clothes. There is also expenditure on the means of transport used. The major difficulty is, however, the dirty water which does not wash the clothes properly and also raises feelings of disgust in the person who is washing the clothes. As one woman remarked, "One does not feel like eating one's food after working in the dirty water."

Solution to the problem came with the building of the government 'ghats' on Minto Road in 1966. These were built of brick and cement mortar and provided with (filtered) tap water. The persons using these ghats had to pay rent to the government for use of the water. But these were available to a few dhobis—only those living in the New Delhi area—and most of the 'sheheri' dhobis had no access to them. The 'sheheri' who are now living in New Delhi are mostly the ones who have been displaced from their original dwellings within the city for one reason or the other.

One or two dhobis then started (around the year 1967) to build their own 'ghats' in front of their own houses with water connection from the municipality water supply—for which one has to pay the municipality rates for commercial water. This meant an initial investment in terms of money and continued expenditure in terms of payment of water bills. But it provided a convenient place for washing clothes much better working

conditions, saving of time and energy in terms of transportation—and clean unpolluted water. One could also dispense with the expensively maintained bullock and cart used for transportation.

Out of 102 households we have the following figures :

TABLE 1  
WHERE DO YOU WASH YOUR CLOTHES ?

<i>Own ghat</i>	<i>Govt. ghat</i>	<i>Use some one else's</i>	<i>Wash at Jamuna</i>	<i>Do not wash</i>
29	24	3	27	17

Out of the twenty nine households which have their own ghats, ten share it with their kin who form separate consumption units. In every case, two or three brothers (and father) have pooled in money towards the construction of the 'ghats' while they formed the same consumption and production unit. Later on while they separated in terms of work and consumption they continue to share rights of user for the 'ghats'; and these rights are passed on to the next generation. Only in two cases is a ghat shared with a person who is not one's father, brother or FB or BS. In one case, it is shared with a neighbour of the 'biradari', and money is received in turn for rights of using. In another case, it is shared with a dhobi not belonging to the sub-caste on basis of friendship. In one case the 'ghat' is shared with FyB, but involves the payment of rent. The ghat however was built by the FyB himself without contribution from anyone else.

The ghats have not been built, all at the same time, different persons building them at different times. The oldest ones having been built 10-12 years back. Decision to build a ghat depends mainly upon the financial condition of the household. Money is either saved or borrowed—even where it is borrowed one should have sufficient income to pay back the loan. The minimum cost given by one informant for building a ghat was Rs. 60-70/- while the minimum cost given was Rs. 1000/-; this included the cost of building the 'bhatti' and the taps and all the fittings. Variation in costs can be attributed to the size and quality of the structure and the time at which it was built.

If cement was available only in the black market at that time, the cost would go up. Variations could also be attributed to over-statement or under-statement by the informants. Whether one can build one's own 'ghat' or not also depends on whether one can get a separate water connection or not? If no water connection is available, it becomes futile to build a ghat. In some places there are tube wells or wells for water supply and no tap connections.

Along with the 'ghat' one needs a 'bhatti' or furnace to steam the clothes. Those who have their own 'ghats' also have their 'bhattis' built along with them. Where the 'ghats' are shared with brothers, the 'bhatti' is also shared. There are two types—one with an iron tank and one without. The former type costs more money, depending upon the quality of the tanks, which may cost between Rs. 60/- to Rs. 120/-. If there is no tank, the cost of building a 'bhatti' can be next to nothing—as one informant said that they got the sand from the banks of the river Jamuna and the bricks from buildings being pulled down nearby—cost being only in terms of labour, time and energy. A 'bhatti' once built lasts for about ten years—after which a tank needs replacement.

Several persons not having their own 'ghat' and 'bhatti' use the ones in the banks of the river Jamuna. They share half the cost of working the 'bhatti' with the person who owns it. One person, who shares the 'bhatti' of a dhobi not of the same 'biradari' pays him Rs.4/- per month rent for the use of his 'bhatti'. Such rental is very rare and mostly the payment is in terms of providing part of the cost of inputs including the fuel required for the furnace. One very poor dhobi, having few clothes to wash is allowed to put his clothes in the 'bhatti' of his 'biradari' men without paying anything. This person is known to be very poor and not having much work, suffering from ill health, having small children to feed. So the fellow 'biradari' men help him out to prevent complete destitution for him and his household.

'Bhatti' is required only for washing heavy cotton clothes and not for washing clothes made of synthetic fibres. Neither is it possible to use it, if clothes have to be cleaned and delivered within one or two days. The persons having such work do not

*P o d c t*

possess a 'bhatti' and may use someone else's, if at all require. Another reason for sharing a 'bhatti' even if one has one's own is the high cost of input in terms of coal that a 'bhatti' requires to work it. To keep a 'bhatti' going one needs about 40 kg coal and if one does not have sufficient clothes to cover up the cost, there is loss of money. Thus when there are insufficient clothes, two persons pool together their clothes and their coal and put on one 'bhatti', the optimum quantity of coal required to feed a 'bhatti' being about 40 kgs. Those who have few clothes to wash may also steam the clothes in a tub on a 'chulha' and thus dispense with the 'bhatti'.

TABLE 2  
POSSESSION AND USE OF 'BHATTI'

Own bhatti		Use	Shared	Do not	Use	Use
Shared with	Not	some	with	use	Govt.	tube
father and/	shared	one	members	bhatti		instead
or brothers	with	else's	of biradari			
	any		other than			
	one		one's			
			immediate			
			kin group			
19	27	10	18	14	7	4

TABLE 3  
POSSESSION AND USE OF WASHING VESSELS

Own vessels		Do not	Shared with	Use the	G
Shared with	Not	use	biradari	ones	
father and/	shared	vessels	member not	lying on	
or brothers	with		part of	the banks	
	any one		immediate kin	of Jamuna	
23	33	27	7	7	4

T=102 N.R.=2

Large vessels are required for soaking the clothes for the purpose of scrubbing. These are of several types—large baked earthen ones about three feet high and four or five feet in diameter—or iron tub like small bath tube but oval in shape.

These, like the 'ghat' and 'bhatti' are also shared in a number of cases. In fact in all instances where the former are shared the vessels are also shared. Apart from those who do not wash clothes but only iron them, these washing vessels are required by all dhobis. Those who do not have their own, use any of the large number of them scattered on the banks of river which are said to be there from a long time and have no particular owners. These are repaired from time to time by whosoever is using them. The cost of a large earthen vessel is about Rs. 70-100/- at current prices.

Previously, all dhobis possessed bulls and carts. The large number of clothes that had to be taken to the riverside to be washed, could only be taken on the carts. The bulls were treated not only as animal resources but like additional members of the household. Even now most dhobis address their bullock as 'beta', a term of affection one uses for a son. A bullock that dies is not sold to the leather worker for its hide, though it might fetch good money, but buried on the banks of the river Jamuna. The rationale given for it being that since it had served loyally and been the means of livelihood as long as it was alive, it is not right to butcher it after its death.

One informant who had brought a prize bullock was eager to have his bullock photographed, that too from various angles and wanted the photographs enlarged and framed like that of a loved one. Later on the bullock fell sick and an old woman of the sub-caste who gave me the information said that it had caught the evil eye while being photographed. One person admitted to having spent Rs. 1,500-2,000 during the illness of his bullock which eventually died and because he had spent so much money on its treatment he could not afford to buy another.

Even though a bullock is a cherished possession there are few households that possess one now-a-days. Out of the 102 households interviewed regarding their mode of transport to the washing place, the figures obtained have been shown in Table 4.

Here we find that the largest numbers are of those who do not need transport. The reasons for this are several. With the building of government ghats and personal 'ghats' at home, there is no need to carry large number of clothes to the river banks. A number of individuals sold their bullock and cart and with the

'bhatti' and may use someone else's if at all required. Reason for sharing a 'bhatti' even if one has one's own, is cost of input in terms of coal that a 'bhatti' requires. To keep a 'bhatti' going one needs about 40 kgs of coal. If one does not have sufficient clothes to cover up the loss of money. Thus when there are insufficient persons pool together their clothes and their own in one 'bhatti', the optimum quantity of coal required for a 'bhatti' being about 40 kgs. Those who have fewer clothes may also steam the clothes in a tub on the fire and thus dispense with the 'bhatti'.

TABLE 2  
POSSESSION AND USE OF 'BHATTI'

bhatti	Use	Shared	Do not	Use	Use
Th Not	some	with	use	Govt.	Use
lf shared	one	members	bhatti		instead
s with	else's	of biradari			
any		other than			
one		one's			
		immediate			
		kin group			
27	10	18	14	7	4

TABLE 3  
POSSESSION AND USE OF WASHING VESSELS

vessels	Do not	Shared with	Use the	Govt.
h Not	use	biradari	ones	
shared	vessels	member not	lying on	
with		part of	the banks	
any one		immediate kin	of Jammu	
33	27	7	7	4

T=102 N.R.=2

vessels are required for soaking the clothes for the

cart in the 'bhatti'—there was too much trouble since it used to stand on the roadside, there was no place in the house, spent the money at home,—and “sold  $1\frac{1}{2}$  years back because of government pressure during Emergency for Rs. 700/- to Rs. 800/-” ... “I had bullock cart but sold due to economic pressure—those who wash in the river Jamuna, cooperate and three or five persons pool together to feed a bullock. My brothers separated from me after their marriage and do not cooperate so I cannot maintain bullock”.

Those who do maintain a bull pursue a system of rotation in which a calf is bought cheap for about Rs. 250-300/- and reared till it grows up. For drawing the lightly loaded carts of the dhobis—carrying only clothes—a small bullock suffices. When it grows up the bullock is sold for a larger sum varying between Rs. 700-1000/ and the balance pocketed as profit. An old or sick bullock can also be sold and the money used to buy a new one—with some additional amount thrown in. Most often a bullock is sold at profit—one informant related a fast transaction “I bought a bullock for Rs. 250/-, 15-16 days back, sold it to the Jamadar for Rs. 300/- for a profit of Rs. 50/-. It is a matter of business when one can make a fast profit, one should”.

Only a few rare individuals who did not have a bullock earlier, have recently bought one. One of them had a cart which he used to draw manually till he saved enough money to buy a bullock. One person bought a small bullock for Rs. 250/- because his children wanted to play with one—he does not have a cart but borrows from someone when required.

Of all the resources, the one most essential for a dhobi, if he is to be called a dhobi at all, is his pressing iron. With the decline of the practice of getting clothes washed from a dhobi this has become indispensable—something which a dhobi must possess even if he does not have 'ghat', 'bhatti', vessels, bullock or cart. The inferior quality pressing iron made entirely of iron costs between Rs. 35-40/- and the superior brass ones about Rs. 150-200/-. At least one iron forms part of the dowry of every girl and the same is given to the couple once they form a separate household. The parents can also give one of the household irons to a son. If required a new iron can be bought in addition to an old one. If ironing is the major source of self-



hood, two or three irons are required in a household to enable two or three individuals to press clothes at the same time. Once an iron gets too old and dysfunctional it is sold to the junk dealer and with the addition of some money a new one is bought. Electric irons are much cheaper and need less maintenance but they have their drawbacks. Firstly, they are not as heavy as brass or iron ones and cannot suitably press the heavier and starched cotton clothes—secondly, the women who do the maximum of ironing are afraid of the electric current and there is a general belief that electricity dries up a woman's blood. It is for this reason that the electric iron which is very suitable for synthetic and lighter fibres is rarely used. Working the electric iron needs much greater attention. The electric current has to be all too often switched on and off. The temperatures of the iron can vary considerably. The wood charcoal fire in the traditional iron is a slower source of heat and excessive heat is ventilated off. Any way, if the coal fire is undistributed by a shaking or the movement of the iron, the accumulation of ash retards the burning process. Thus the wood charcoal iron is more adjusted to the varying and simultaneous demands on a woman such as cooking, looking after children, being at the call of the husband, i.e. in the totality of tasks she performs around the house.

Another reason for the rejection of the electric iron is the simple non-availability of electric connections under the trees or in the lanes where the dhobis mostly set up their ironing tables. Some houses also do not have electricity connections. Only three households have electric irons and these are the ones in which at least some members are educated—and there is maximum utility for electric iron i.e. the work is of only ironing urgent clothes from hotels which are predominantly of light synthetic fibres. The response to the question as which production good they would like to possess we obtained answers as shown in Table. A place for washing clothes ('ghat') and tap in the house is clearly the topmost priority for most dhobis. Many of them do not want to have anything else, either because they already possess everything or else do not have the space to keep anything else or are simply satisfied with the way things are i.e. sharing with others etc.

TABLE 5  
POSSESSION OF IRONS

Quality of iron	Iron	Brass	Possess Both iron and brass	Electric	Do not possess
No. of households	58	21	15	4	2
			Total = 102	N.R. = 2	

TABLE 6  
WHAT IS THE PRODUCTION GOOD YOU WOULD LIKE TO POSSESS NEXT ?

Production	Ghat	Bhatti	Wash-	New	Bullock	Wash-	Bamboo
Good	tap		ing	iron	& cart	ing	& ropes
	in the		machine			vessels	for
	house.						drying
							clothes
<hr/>							
No. of respondents	21	8	3	12	2	6	1
	None	N.A.					
	26	13					
Total=102				N.R. = 10			

Apart from these resources, one also needs chemicals and coal for washing and ironing. The amount of soda, bleach, acid, blueing and optical brightener (Tinopal) depends upon the amount of clothes one gets and the nature of the clothes. For cotton clothes (mostly white) one requires about 1 kg. of soap per 100 clothes—and equal amount of soda. Within limits a certain variation is however possible in the proportions of soap and soda, but decrease in the amount of soap with increased soda, also means that greater effort and energy has to go into washing. One can reduce the quantity of soap and increase the amount of soda—like for 200-250 clothes one can either use 2 kg soap and 2 kg soda or 1 kg soap and 3kg soda, the latter comes out cheaper because soap varies from Rs. 4/- per kg

to Rs. 5/- per kg while soda costs around Rs. 2.80 per kg. Coloured clothes need more soap, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  kg compared to 1 kg for white clothes. Starch required also depends upon which kind of clothes are being washed—for 100 pieces of “dhoti” and “kurtas” one requires about 1 kg of starch. Acid is cheap and to a ‘bhatti’ full of 100-150 clothes one needs to add only 10 paise or 15 paise worth of acid, 950 gms of bleach suffices for one ‘bhatti’ and it costs Rs. 7/- per kg.

In case of clothes of mixed natural and synthetic fibres or for those that come for urgent washing, one needs much greater amount of soap for these are not boiled in soap nor are they put on ‘bhatti’ but scrubbed with cakes of soap—for 100 clothes one needs about 3kg of soap—little soda, a little bleach and no acid. An optical brightener is added to expensive white clothes only, about 10 gms at a time for it is very expensive—Rs. 14 60 for a box of about 50 gms. A person who uses Tinopal for urgent washing said he uses up to Rs. 100/- worth of Tinopal in peak season in a month.

Coal is required both for ironing as well as for the ‘bhatti’ For the former, wood charcoal is used which costs about 80 paise per kg. For one iron to run the whole day, it needs to be fed about 5 kg of coal—if it is to be run at night also, it needs 10 kg. Most informants said that they require between 3 kg to 5 kg on the days they iron clothes. For only those whose only source of earning is from ironing, ironing is an every day affair—others iron about 3 days a week. The ‘bhatti’ requires about 40 kg of soft coke to run overnight, a small ‘bhatti’ may take on half the amount. Soft coke is bought in baskets—one basket of good quality coke costing Rs. 4/- while those containing a cheaper variety picked up from railway shunting yards costs Rs. 2/-. Usually a mixture of the two is used.

It is not possible to determine exactly how much soap or soda a dhobi buys regularly for the amount is not fixed—even for the same number of clothes. On the spot decisions are made as to the cash in hand, the possibility of getting credit, the status of the client etc.; apart from the technical factors of fabric, colour and the degree of steaming to which the clothes can be subjected.

### Inheritance, Saving and Credit

Apart from the expenditure of his own labour a dhobi has other sources from which he can get money and other forms of capital goods—these are in the form of inheritance saving and credit.

Most dhobis receive their inheritance through the division of property at the time of separation of their nuclear household from the parental household. Few receive it as inheritance at the demise of parents—only the youngest or an only son does so. Few dhobis have substantial inheritance to pass on to the next generation. The standard pattern for a son is to receive his dowry utensils, jewellery and all that he received at his wedding, plus some utility items like an iron or an ironing table.

Production goods like 'ghat', 'bhatti' etc. are not divided, but used in common even after separation of households. If a household shifts residence then it carries only the movable goods with it but retains rights of user, if they want, over the immovable ones. Clients are an important resource that may or may not be distributed amongst the sons depending upon the wishes of the father and the earning capacity of the son. If the latter manages to secure some clients for himself before actual separation he may himself refuse to accept any clients from his father.

Out of the sixty-four cases of division recorded we got the following statistics of division :

TABLE 7

Q— WHAT DID YOU GET FROM YOUR PARENTAL HOUSEHOLD AT THE TIME OF SEPARATION ?

Dowry utensils and jewellery	Clients	Money	Immoveble property	Got separate structure made by parents	Production goods	
					Iron	Bullock and cart
No. of respo- ndents	57	23	None	None	1	41
						3—sold & divided money

Money and immovable property like house, buildings etc. have never been received in inheritance because in the present generation or earlier one no one saved or accumulated money or bought any property. Almost all dhobis live in rented houses. In the entire sub-caste only two persons were found having their own house. Where a son sets up a separate residence, he can either take a new quarter on rent or build his own structure on the roof of his parents' house or nearby. The cost of such a structure is mostly borne by the son himself. Clients likewise are given to a son only if the father has a surplus which he cannot handle with advancing age and lack of helping hands. At times even when the household is together, the clients may be implicitly divided in the sense that certain clients are handled by specific members of the household. After division, the persons concerned retain the respective clients they had been dealing with. In one case a man was selling vegetables for sometime after his separation—till he got sufficient work to carry on dhobi work.

At times, the clientelle that is inherited is adequate for a person to earn his living which may be as many as twenty. Mostly a man builds up his clientelle on his own. At least one iron and an ironing table is a must for any one setting up a new household—along with one 'chullah' and domestic utensils. These, together with jewellery and clothes and some furniture form the dowry items of most couples. The contribution from the boy's parents is only in terms of whatever jewellery and clothes they had given to the daughter-in-law at the time of her wedding. One iron and few utensils may be added.

Bullock and cart is usually held in common but may be sold and the money divided if the circumstances demand it. This may be in the case of conflict between brothers over rights of use or at such times as when there is no use for them.

Through inheritance a person thus receives only as much as barely enables him to earn a living in the traditional occupation and nothing more. In case of a younger son or only son who receives most or all of parent's meagre belongings, the amount received often does not cover up the obligations which it entails

in terms of debts and social obligations of given gifts to the relatives.

The scantiness of the inheritance reflects on another aspect of the dhobi economy namely savings. As a rule, a dhobi does not save. In traditional times surplus earnings which were not spent in leisure activities were converted into jewellery. Now-a-days the formidable prices of silver and gold have set severe limits in the purchase of jewellery. Bank accounts are very rare and insurance is hardly thought of. The chief source of savings is through committees or lotteries. In the traditional times when prices of gold and silver were attractively low, surplus earnings were often invested in gold and silver jewellery. In fact this was the only form of saving at that time because there was no system of lotteries, which is a later development.

From the 98 households interviewed as to savings, we got the following figures :

TABLE 8  
Q— HOW DO YOU SAVE ?

<i>At home</i>	<i>No saving</i>	<i>In lotteries</i>	<i>In banks</i>	<i>In insurance</i>
3	18	87	2	2

Note :—Some individuals subscribe to more than one form of savings.

The following Table indicates the amount of money saved by individual households.

TABLE 9

<i>No. of households</i>	<i>The amount of money saved per month</i>
17	Rs. 10-50/-
25	Rs. 50-100/-
19	Rs. 100-150/-
7	Rs. 150-200/-
5	Rs. 200-250/-
3	Rs. 250-300/-

The Table clearly indicates that not many households have the propensity to save too much.

The fact that very large percentage of individuals contribute to lotteries is due to the reason that it is almost a compulsory form of saving with the 'biradari'. The compulsion is derived from two factors—first is the rational decision of individuals to have at least some source which can be of help to him in times of need. To save in lotteries is the most attractive alternative in comparison to banks and insurance because here one deals on a face to face basis with persons one knows well, who belong to one's group. For unsophisticated and illiterate persons such a saving scheme provides much simpler means to saving, than dealing with banks and officials. Most dhobis are illiterate and cannot write out cheques or otherwise check accounts. The second factor is the 'biradari' which forces every person to deposit the requisite amount at the right time. Fear of losing face in the 'biradari' is a strong enough motivation for a person to put aside the money which he would be otherwise tempted to spend. It is the self realization that they will be able to save only under such social pressure that lottery networks are run within the sub-caste.

The most tempting source of obtaining money is through credit. The lottery system of saving has the drawback that one cannot withdraw the money whenever one likes, but has to wait for one's turn. If any contingency arises, then borrowing remains the only alternative. Previously, professional money lenders were approached but they used to charge exorbitant rates of interests. The introduction of the lottery system has reduced the need to borrow from the 'baniya' or money lender. Now-a-days clients are often approached for loans (the repayment may not be in cash but in kind by washing an equivalent amount of clothes). If clients cannot be approached, then loan may be taken from some friend or even a money lender and the money returned at such time as one receives the money contributed to the lottery.

The panchayat which takes Rs. 2/- contribution per household per month also provided a system of credit at minimal interest. Any person who needed the money could borrow at the rate of 2% per annum. However, only nine individuals out

of 102 admitted of having taken a loan from the panchayat. Most persons denied ever having taken money from the panchayat. Some admitted it was a matter of shame before the 'biradari'. To take a panchayat loan meant openly admitting one's inadequacy to most certain expenditures. One indignant old man, when asked whether he had ever received monetary help from the panchayat, replied, "I am a Chaudhary of the 'biradari'. How can I borrow from the panchayat? It is for the lesser people to borrow, the ones who are nothing in the 'biradari'." Credit from clients need not always be in the form of cash but in kind also. Like if a client runs an electrical goods shop, an article like a table fan or radio may be bought on credit and the money realized either through the washing of equivalent amount of clothes or in easy instalments.

It is a unique feature that most often persons do not save to spend, they take a loan to spend and then utilize their savings to repay the loan. Thus credit becomes one of the basic features of the dhobi economic cycle—one of the chief means of obtaining resources.

TABLE 10  
Q—WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SAVING MONEY ?

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>To pay off debts</i>	<i>Spend in marriages of children and kin</i>	<i>No savings</i>	<i>Not sure, may spend on any thing</i>
No. of Respondents	20	46	26	2
Total=102				N.R. =8

The narrow margin between earnings and expenditure which can sometimes be negative, leading to the need for credit, an important fact of dhobi economy, namely its incapacity for growth, which, as we shall show in the next sections is rooted partly in technological factors and organisation of production and partly in the relation with the total economic structure of which it is a part and partly in the functions of the 'biradari'.



TABLE 11

Q—WHERE DID YOU ACTUALLY SPEND YOUR SAVINGS LAST ?

Occasion	No expense for a long time No Savings	To pay off debts	In a marriage	Death	Business	Repairing House
No. of respon- dents	8	43	36	2	1	5
		Going for pilgrimage				
		2				

Total=102    N.R.=3

**Note :** By comparing the two Tables we find that informants respond differently when faced with the same or similar question framed differently. In the first instance the question was less specific than in the second instance so that the number of no response category as well as vague responses like "No savings" "Do not know" were more but in the latter case faced with a question to which more specific answer was required, the no response and indeterminate response category is considerably reduced.

### The Technological Process

There is a similarity of the dhobi technology with the characteristics of the technology associated with the D.M.P. as given by Marshall Sahlins "The basic apparatus can usually be handled by household groups ; much of it can be wielded autonomously by individuals .... implements are homespun, thus as most skills—simple enough to be widely available, productive processes are unitary rather than decomposed by an elaborate division of labour, so that the same interested party can carry through the whole procedure from the extraction of raw material to the fabrication of the finished good" (Sahlins, 1974, p 79)

The second step of steaming is accomplished by an apparatus which consists of a hearth about 2 feet in diameter, usually made six inches below ground level, around which a mound about 60 to 90 cms high is raised with brick or stone and daub or cement. On this mound is placed an iron grill about 45 cms or 60 cms in diameter. A larger copper vessel can now be placed on the grill and heated by a fire burning below. This is called a 'bhatti'. A variation in the 'bhatti' is to place a thick iron vessel on the inside of the mound such that the brim of the vessel rests on the inner edge of the mound and the body and bottom of the vessel which is about 408 cms in height and 60 cms in diameter is in direct contact with the fire below. Another improvisation of the 'bhatti' is a small iron tub about 90 cms wide which can be placed on the domestic 'chullah'.

In the 'bhatti' vessel, 10 to 15 centimetres of water is placed and when the clothes to be steamed are very dirty then about 50 gms of caustic soda or 2 kg of washing soda may be added to it. Another way out for steaming heavily soiled clothes is to put spent lye instead of water in the vessel. Spent lye is a cheaply available waste product from the manufacturer of soap in the form of a dark brown liquor containing small percentages of caustic soda and glycerine along with other substances left after soap has been precipitated from the mother liquor in the manufacturing process of soap.

The next step is to arrange the clothes to be steamed. The garments are first wet and then wrung and then placed on the brim of the copper vessel in the fashion of making coiled pottery and so a dome of garments is made over the vessel which contains water. Before lining the clothes as above, a thick sheet is spread over the mouth and around the 'bhatti' vessel. This sheet will ultimately cover the clothes arranged on the 'bhatti' from outside.

This sheet ensures two things, first that any spurts from the water or the liquid that is being used in the 'bhatti' vessel do not get on the clothes arranged above, second as a general covering from outside it prevents the yellowing of garments from the smoke coming from the fire below. The coal used is generally a mixture of fresh low grade hard coke and hard coke remnants picked up from the ashes dropped by the boilers of railway

engines picked from the railway yard and picked from the city garbage dumping sites. The resultant fuel can be quite smoky at times. To avoid spurting of the liquid, pebbles from the river bed or half bricks are placed at the bottom of the vessel. Once the fire gets going, the liquid begins to give off steam. This steam diffuses through the several layers of garments and comes out on the outside. In the process a lot of steam is condensed and falls back into the vessel.

The 'bhatti' goes on overnight or for about 8 to 10 hours. The action of the steam is to break down the greases and oils that form part of the soiling matter and thus loosen the dirt. This process is reputed to remove all strains except those of iron mould and the stain from the juice of a banana flower. Sometimes ink stains turn to brown iron mould, probably the inks contain ferrocyanide or ferricyanide.

The night long action of steam is very harsh on the clothes and so clothes of synthetic fibres or cotton synthetic fibres and silks and woollens cannot be put on the 'bhatti'. Cotton-polyester clothes can however be thus steamed, but it requires a considerable adroitness on the part of the washerman to place them as far away and as much on the outside as possible from the centre of the vessel.

Usually, garments containing synthetic yarns are not put on the 'bhatti'. The 'bhatti' action can also be harsh on colours. In the first place, coloured garments whose colour runs in water cannot be steamed on the 'bhatti' at all, because the other garments would be stained by it. Second, the action of the steam can fade out most colours and so if coloured garments are to be steamed they have to be again far out from the centre.

Another action of this process may be in terms of shrinking or swelling fibres. Fibres that are likely to swell and whose fibre count is large (i.e. they are, keeping in mind the width of the yarn, closely woven) are likely to hinder the diffusion of steam or blocking its path greatly. Such garments, usually heavy clothes are first sprinkled with a very fine light yellow clay. It is called 'Badri mitti' or the mud from Badri. This helps in permitting the steam to go through. Similarly the garments are first wrung and then placed on the 'bhatti' because the wrung  
 is permit a better diffusion and spread of steam

Dirtier garments are placed towards the inside and nearer the centre of the vessel and cleaner clothes further away. The coal fire has to be kept alive during the night. If it gets extinguished or becomes too slow over long periods, then the entire work is ruined and the 'bhatti' has to be started afresh.

When rags or very highly soiled garments are to be cleaned they are usually soaked overnight in a dilute solution of caustic soda or spent lye, and then they are put on the 'bhatti'.

The steamed clothes, now must be washed. The process of washing involves soaping the garments, beating out the dirt and paying attention to heavily soiled portions. For this purpose, a big baked earthen vessel called 'hauda' is used for rubbing soap. Soap scrubbing is also done on a stone platform which is also used to beat the clothes on. During the scrubbing, a white scum scrapped from agricultural fields is added to the water. It is basically a mixture of salts of calcium, magnesium etc. It is unlikely that it has much detergent action. It definitely does act as a whitening and brightening agent. The dhobis, however, claim that it has a cleaning effect. It may be due to the abrasive action of undissolved salts.

This preliminary scrubbing over, the clothes are next taken to the beating platform. Here soap may be applied to specific portions and standing knee deep in water, the dhobi beats the clothes on the stone platform, dipping them occasionally in the water in which he is standing which may be the river Jamuna or the washing area at home.

He beats, rinses and wrings the garment, thereby, removing loose dirt. Cotton yarn has capillary spaces in it where dirt can be lodged. The beating drives the dirt out as also removes soap or soapy water that may have gone into the fibre. Any soap left in the garment can come out as an ugly yellow stain during ironing.

Consequently, heavier garments have to be heavily beaten and sometimes a wooden staff may have to be employed for the purpose of beating. This part of the cleaning process is followed by bleaching of the garments. A laundry bleaching powder is mixed in the water, one part of bleaching powder to 100 parts of water and 10-15 cubic centimetres of sulfuric acid is added to the mixture. White clothes are immersed in this and may be

left for half an hour to one hour. If the number of clothes to be bleached is very great then the garments are dipped inside the bleach and then rested on the brim of the 'hauda'. The bleaching mixture then percolates through the garment and has an added strong action.

As the garments lie on the brim of the 'hauda', the bleaching waters may be sprinkled on the garments which in percolating through and down and back into the vessel also exerts a strong bleaching action. The bright sun and fresh air also add to the bleaching.

The bleaching, apart from whitening the fibres also removes any excess of alkali or soap that may be in the garment. The nearly exhausted bleaching waters may be used to bleach and brighten garments that have colours on them.

The next step involves the use of optical whitening-brightening chemicals available in the market. And finally the blueing of white clothes with ultramarine used as one part of ultramarine to 1000 parts of water. While blueing, care has to be taken that the dispersion of the blueing agent is uniform, and the garment is quickly moved inside the water and then it is wrung to dispel the water, taking care that there occurs no concentration of blue in any particular part of the garment. When starching has to be done to the garments as well as blueing, then starching and blueing are done in the same water bath. Starch can be made in two ways. One is to dissolve one part of starch in 250 parts of water and then warming the mixture over a slow fire, continuously stirring until a gelatinous liquid is formed. Another process is to make a thick emulsion of starch in cold water and then to pour hot water on to it, continuously stirring until a gel is formed.

The first method is used for making large quantities of starch and the second for making small quantities. First, the blueing agent is put in a muslin, squeezed into the water, vigorously stirring it at the same time, until the required depth of colour is obtained. The muslin is used as a sieve for bleaches, optical brighteners, blueing and starch, in order to avoid any nodules of material from getting into the bath. This avoids wastage of material in the form of nodules as well as prevents a concentrated application of the material to any particular part and

consequent spoiling of the washing thereby. As the bath gets exhausted by use, it is refurbished by squeezing out the chemical from the muslin a little more each time. Then the starch gel is taken in the muslin and similarly introduced into the water. Then the clothes are dipped in, taken out and wrung dry to the extent desirable, keeping in view the amount of blue and starch that is to be left in the garment to obtain a good finish.

Before putting the clothes out to dry they have to be whipped to ensure more uniform drying and also to take out heavy wrinkles which are formed during the cleaning process. Clothes when they are sufficiently dried are collected, but before they are piled up, they are again stretched to remove wrinkles/crinkles. Some of the larger garments like 'sarees' and 'dhotis' are stretched and folded up.

Now the garments are to be hung or placed out to dry. Sun and wind act as bleaching agents : if the garments are spread out on lawns or green plants, it adds to the bleaching action. So the dhobis often like to use municipal gardens for drying out their clothes. Clothes may also be dried by spreading out on the river sands, or they may be hung on clothes-lines made by stretching two tight intertwined ropes between poles. The ends of the garments are pushed in between the turning of the ropes and thus the garments hang quite securely.

The clothes have then to be ironed out. For this they are moistened, by sprinkling a little water on them, rolled up and left for fifteen-twenty minutes for the moisture to spread. Three kinds of irons are in use. One is the electric one, weighing 16 lbs-18 lbs ; and second is the coal heated iron, weighing around 25 lbs, this has a bottom that is made of copper and a body of iron or copper ; the third is the traditional iron weighing about 5 lbs like a heavy iron slipper; it can be directly heated over a coal fire and then used to iron clothes. In the coal heated iron, wood charcoal is used, coke is unsuitable. The electric iron works out cheaper, but the coal heated one is considered to be more efficient especially on heavier and starched clothes since its bottom plate is made of copper which requires less cleaning and is not to run over the garments.

Ironing is done on a flat table sized about 100 cms by 65 cms

and has several layers of cloth on it acting as a pad. The process of ironing again needs to be learnt, what parts to iron first and from where to hold the garment and how to turn it around etc. A wet rag is often rubbed over the garment while ironing to moisturise the garment. The garment is then folded and is ready for delivery to the client. This entire process in the washermen's household takes seven days. The various tasks associated with the washing and ironing of clothes as spread over seven days may be depicted by the following cycle.

- 1st day — Collection of clothes from the households of the clients  
 2nd day — Sorting and marking the clothes  
 3rd day — Putting on the 'bhatti'—takes 24 hours  
 4th day — Steamed clothes from the 'bhatti' are beaten out and washed. Spread out to dry.  
 5th day } Dried clothes are resorted and ironed. Normally takes  
 6th day } 2-3 days to iron out all the clothes put in a 'bhatti'.  
 7th day — Washed and ironed clothes are distributed.

This is the ideal picture of the seven day cycle. At times when there are many clothes—two 'bhattis' may be put on in a week and then the collection, distribution and ironing of clothes goes on along with the washing. Even in the seven day cycle—distribution goes on side by side, but normally clothes are collected over 2-3 days before a 'bhatti' is put on. When there are few clothes that come to be washed, the clothes may be collected over a much longer period and the 'bhatti' put on only after 15 days. The household in the meantime survives by ironing out clothes that come only to be ironed or by any other subsidiary income. The following Table gives the number of 'bhattis' put on by different households.

TABLE 12

Q—HOW MANY 'BHATTIS' DO YOU PUT ON IN A WEEK/  
FORTNIGHT/MONTH

Frequency	Once a week	Twice a week	Once in a fortnight	Once a month	Do not wash
No. of households	52	2	24	4	31
Total	102			N R.	7

When clothes are to be cleaned within twenty four hours or the garment has some synthetic fibre in it, then it is not practical to go through the long process of steaming the clothes. This is also true when the number of clothes to be washed are very few. In this case the clothes are directly washed in a soap and soda solution. Sometimes lye is added to the garment and it is laid on the side of the tub and scrubbed with a scrubber of jute ropes. The cluster of raw jute ropes for scrubbing is more efficient than a quill or nylon brush especially since it does not soften but instead it retains its stiffness on long contact with water.

Then the garments are beaten and washed, treated and finished as described earlier. Synthetic fabrics do not require an ultramarine blueing or starching.

Some of the complexities and nuisances involved in the washing have been detailed above but these are not all.

Each step in the cleaning process requires decision, keeping in view the fibre, how fine or coarse it is, what it is made of and the nature of the soiling and intimate knowledge of the effects of different aspects of the washing process. Added to all the above factors is the knowledge about the customer. What kind of work he likes? What does he pay? What is the financial condition of the dhobi himself? All-in-all a highly qualitative judgement is required. The only scope for the dhobi to rationally improve in his economic pursuit would be to introduce measurement into his work pattern, but seeing the complex variations in the washing, it would seem better for him to rely on his own judgement rather than objective evaluation. One educated youth for example, said that he counted the number of strokes he gave to any piece of cloth depending upon how much money the client paid him, increasing the number of strokes for a well paying client. Most dhobis, however, do not practise such a system of calculated discrimination.

The most important aspects of the technology is that it is not easily learnt. For most dhobi children however, it is almost an unconscious process of learning as they grow up in their traditional culture (see chapter—The Actor). Moreover, the heavy input of labour tends to restrict the dhobi's field of social interaction by giving him very little time for leisure, which has important consequences. It also makes him dependent upon the



cooperation of the fellow dhobis.

### **The Organization of Work**

"The household is as such charged with production, with the deployment and use of labour power, with the determination of the economic objective. Its own inner relations, as between husband and wife, parent and child are the principal relations of production...." (Sahlins, 1974, p. 77). The above lines are an apt description of the organization of productive activity amongst the dhobis. The traditional dhobi work demands a household organization of labour. One adult male and one adult female (normally provided by the husband-wife team) is the minimum and necessary work unit. Division of labour is essentially on the lines of sex, the men washing the clothes and the women ironing them. Any breakdown in this minimal unit leads to an incapacity to perform the traditional work, unless the unit is replaced.

Traditionally, the death of a spouse called for replacement through remarriage—for the man or the woman as the case may be. A man refrained from remarriage only if he had an adult daughter or daughter-in-law in the house to do the ironing work and a woman, if she had an adult son to wash clothes for her.

The organization of work, though involving a basic line of division of labour, is based more upon cooperation and adjustment in performance, than upon any rigidly prescribed system of allocation of tasks. Work is a matter of moment to moment decision-making. In a household, consisting of husband, wife and minor children, the wife has to do the cooking, cleaning of the house and utensils, bathing and feeding the children apart from the ironing of clothes. The man has to wash the clothes, dry them, collect them and distribute them. In addition, things have to be bought from the market, food may have to be taken to the man who goes to work at the banks of the river, someone has to watch over the clothes while they dry. When the 'bhatti' is put on, it involves an all-night vigil to see that the fire does not get extinguished or that it is lit evenly.

Though the sexual division of labour holds by and large it is not rigid. The load for ironing is more than the husband

irons, while the wife cooks. The children can be asked to wash utensils while the mother irons. The older children can bathe the younger ones, if the mother is busy. If the wife is working the husband can go and get the ration or if the husband has gone to wash clothes the wife can distribute clean clothes to clients. Children can go to the 'ghat' to give lunch. If the work load is heavy (for washing) the wife can go to the 'ghat' with the lunch and help her husband in scrubbing the clothes or hanging them out to dry. As a cultural preference it is not considered quite proper for a woman, especially an unmarried girl, to go to the 'ghat'. But when there is a heavy work load and shortage of hands a man may take even his unmarried daughter to the 'ghat' with him—though the choice, if it is possible, falls usually on the wife or daughter-in-law.

If the wife is sick or in her menstruation and there is no other woman available for helping, the husband can even do the cooking. One person, who is a milk vender goes only in the evening to distribute milk while his wife irons clothes in a nearby lane during the day. He stays at home during the day and looks after the children and prepares the meals.

There is practically no work that an individual, either male or female, cannot or should not do, if so required. Widows with small children and no male relatives, may even go to the Jamuna to wash clothes like a man. A man similarly may do practically any household task in an emergency situation. Children are called upon to do any light task that they are capable of doing, though normally girls follow their mothers, while boys try their hand at father's work. Apart from dire necessity, it is a matter of propriety that man and women stick to their respective, culturally recognized tasks.

However, there are certain tasks that are neutral *i.e.* there is no culturally recognized sex or age preference in their performance. It is in the carrying out of such tasks that maximum manipulations are brought into play. Bringing clothes from the clients is one such job.

The following answers were obtained in reply a question regarding who generally goes to bring clothes from the clients ?

TABLE 13

Q—WHO GOES TO BRING CLOTHES FROM THE CLIENTS ?

<i>Adult Male</i> <i>Father/husband</i>	<i>Adult Male</i> <i>son</i>	<i>Adult Female</i> <i>Mother/wife</i>	<i>Some times</i> <i>husband &amp; sometimes wife</i>	<i>Child-</i> <i>ren</i>	<i>Any-</i> <i>one</i>
43	15	9	13	2	16

These figures become relevant only when one looks at the composition of the household, the nature of the work and the distance at which the clients are situated. In most nuclear households where the wife is young and the children small, the husband goes to bring the clothes, because the wife cannot leave the children or the household chores. In most extended households it is the elderly father who goes to bring clothes, since, being elderly, he avoids the heavy work and prefers lighter work like bringing clothes and collecting money from clients. In this way he also ensures greater control over the household expenditures. An elderly mother, especially if she is a widow may also be entrusted with the bringing of clothes since she can be spared from heavier duties and in case she is a widow she takes the place of the father.

The wife may also go to bring clothes if there are grown up children who can do the cooking and the old mother-in-law can look after the house. Children and women go only to collect clothes from the neighbourhood. If the clients are farther off, the women and children cannot go and the men have to go on cycle or by bus to collect clothes. In households which have work from hotels, hospitals etc. young sons, who are somewhat literate, go to get the clothes since their fathers are illiterate, and not articulate enough to deal with the hospital or hotel management staff unless of course the head of the household is himself young. In large households (extended or joint) with many clients, growing children, mostly above the age of ten are also sent to get clothes. At times, sons tend to pick up their separate clientele right from this stage. At first they have a few households allotted to them from where they collect dirty clothes as well as distribute back clean ones and collect the money. As they grow older they slowly start washing and cleaning the

clothes of these clients in addition to collecting and delivering them. They may be even allowed at this stage to keep part of the money collected, as their pocket expenditure. These then come to be termed as their 'personal' clients. After getting married and separating, they retain these clients since the father and other brothers had stopped dealing with them long ago.

The money brought from clients is usually given to the head of the household who may be the father or widowed mother. In case of a nuclear household of husband and wife, the husband keeps back some money for his personal expenditure and gives the rest to his wife. In the extended households also, the money may be given to the father who passes it on to the mother or directly to the mother. In case of sons earning separately or in salaried jobs—part of the money is kept back for personal use and the rest is given to the parents or wives. Sometime the sons do not disclose the actual amount earned by them but give only a fixed sum at home. For example one man earning Rs. 260/- gives Rs. 200/- to his parents and keeps back Rs. 60/-, another earning Rs. 600/- gives Rs. 400/- to his father and keeps 200/- for his own expenditure. One man in traditional occupation who helps his parents in washing and ironing clothes gives Rs. 15/- to his parents for every Rs. 20-25/- he gets and keeps the rest for himself.

Household expenditure, especially day-to-day expenditure, is in the hands of women who may be the mother or the wife; even unmarried but grown up daughters (above 13 years of age) may be quite often entrusted with money and household expenditures. Even where men control expenditure in terms of dictating how much is to be spent or what is to be bought, the money passes through the hands of the women. Actually the need for control of expenditure is minimal, for the general pattern is to spend the money as it comes.

The income as well as expenditure is largely on a day-to-day basis. All foodstuff excluding rations is bought daily the latter being bought weekly or fortnightly. There is an effort to adjust daily income to daily expenditure like on food and weekly or monthly income to weekly or monthly expenditure like on ration, electricity and water bills and material for washing and ironing. In answer to—who controls expenditures? the following answers

were obtained :

TABLE 14

<i>Mother/wife/ daughter-in-law</i>	<i>Father/husband</i>	<i>Husband and wife equal</i>	<i>Unmarried daughter</i>
46	21	22	8
Others=3	N. R.=2	Total=102	

(Others include grown up sons in two households and the grand mother (FM) in one).

Control of expenditure like other aspects of the work organization is more a matter of adjustment, rather than authority. Since there is little accumulation of money, there is not much authority resulting from its control, rather the handling of money is a matter of convenience depending upon who spends maximum time at home? Also since household work is the forte of the women it is the best solution to let her run household expenditure for she is in the best position to know what is to be bought at any time.

Other expenses are normally in the hands of men, especially those required for production purposes—though even these expenses might be incurred by the women—especially in a nuclear household. Moreover, there is no rigidity; if required, even children may take out money and spend it and take independent decisions in spending small amounts.

In answer to who decides what is to be cooked on any particular day?, the following answers were received :

TABLE 15

<i>Unmarried daughter</i>	<i>Mother/wife daughter-in-law</i>	<i>Husband/ Father</i>	<i>Children</i>	<i>Anybody</i>	<i>Depends on money</i>
4	50	5	12	14	3
1—grandmother				N. R.—13	

Since the women do the cooking, it is again part of the working rule that she decides what is to be cooked. Cooking itself follows a general pattern adjusted to the work pattern of the women—the morning meal consists of vegetables and 'chappatis' and and rice and 'deal' in the evening. The reason for preparing rice at least one time a day is that women cannot

spare enough time from ironing to make 'chappatis' twice during the day. It takes much longer preparing 'chappatis' one by one, whereas for rice and 'daal' one needs much less time, for they are to be put to boil and the women can occupy themselves elsewhere. This also explains why the dhobis are rice eaters in a predominantly wheat-eating cultural area. Another economic reason for eating rice is that in earlier times the starch used for the clothes was got from the boiled rice water and even today, though commercial starch is available in the market, rice water may be used. But the morning meal (and morning is the time for harder work) is 'chappatis'. According to the above reasoning, morning meal should be 'daal' and rice. But may be the answer lies in the fact that 'chappatis' can sustain one from hunger for longer periods. Rice is quickly digested with work and therefore there is soon a desire to eat again which is to be avoided. Also, chappatis can be cooked and eaten with "chatnis" or quickly prepared salads while rice must have some more substantial accompaniment (like 'daal', meat or vegetable curries).

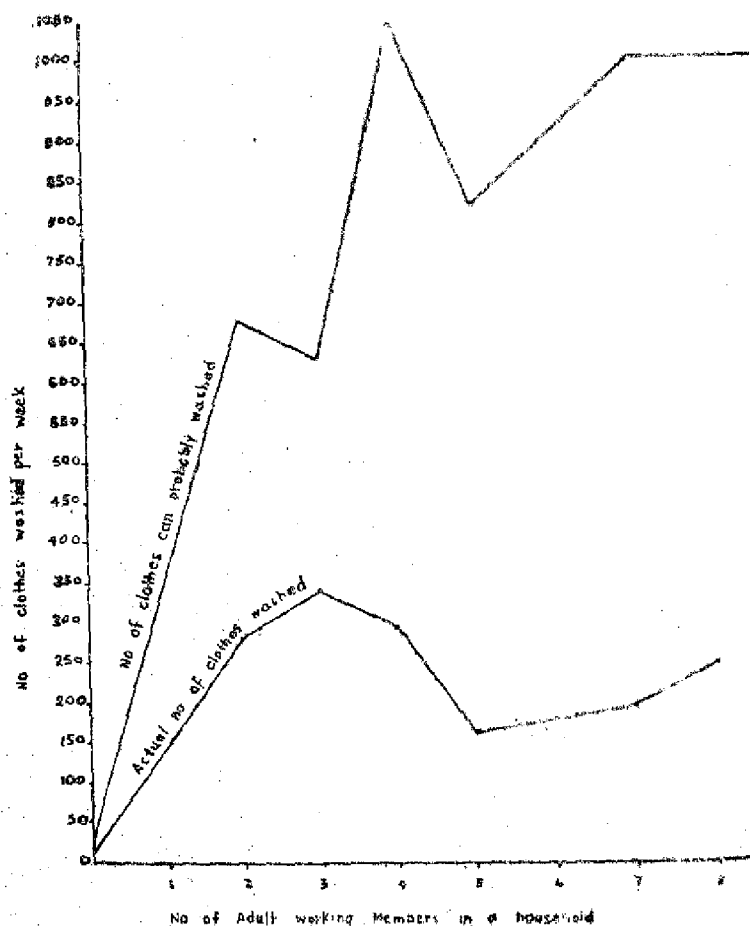
Children are often consulted as to what they want to eat because they are the ones likely to make the greatest fuss about eating something. What is to be cooked also depends on the money in hand? The dhobis eat according to whatever they can afford at the moment—if they have a little spare money they will spend it eating meat and drinking liquor—if they do not have money they will be content with only rice and 'daal' or lentils.

All this goes to show that the organization of work is based on a division of labour which is but loosely defined and the structure of authority and decision making is also loose and open to adjustments rather than being based on rigid compliance to one authority.

This loose knit structure of authority and scope for individual manipulations, which in turn is correlated to the techno-economic process, makes the management of large groups for production difficult, leading to underperformance. The relationship between economic underperformance and lack of authority has been noted by other authors as well e.g. Mary Douglas writes of the Lele "Those who have anything to do with the Lele must have noticed the absence of anyone

who could give orders with a reasonable hope of being obeyed .... The lack of authority goes a long way to explain their poverty" (Douglas, 1963, p. 1).

A comparison of the number of working members with the number of clothes washed or ironed per week gives us the following picture as represented in the graph.



This may be linked up with the fact that the division of labour being based primarily on the sexual division between man and woman and which, minimally being provided by the man-woman unit of husband and wife, any increase in household composition that duplicates the husband unit, will also lead to duplication of individuals required for a particular task. Normally, this should lead to household working at greater capacity e.g. 2 men and 2 women should work double the amount worked by 1 man and 1 woman. But as we see that this is not so ; in fact duplication leads to lesser work being done by each individual. Had there been a more elaborate division of labour or a stricter authority system which allowed the amount of work done by individuals to be supervised by someone who had authority so do so, larger work groups would have been working more. But under the system of informal authority and a division of tasks based on mutual adjustments, larger work groups lead to confusion regarding work and consequently less work being done. As pointed out earlier, informal patterns of authority and a rather flexible division of labour are in themselves related to technological and other economic factors.

The interesting fact that emerges is that larger work units consisting of several adult males and females do not, comparatively speaking, do more work than smaller units of 1 male, 1 female. The units which are working to their full capacity are the smallest units especially those consisting of a young or middle aged couple not exceeding 40-45 years.

A comparison of the lines on graph indicating the number of clothes individuals can possibly wash or iron, with the number of clothes they actually wash or iron, shows that there is an underuse of labour power in the traditional occupation, a fact that is verbally supported by the informants. Coupled with this is the fact that an individual is at peak performance only during a short span of his life cycle. This span is determined by several factors, including the kind of household the individual is working in — nuclear or joint.

If we divide our sample into three age categories of adult working members (the categories being made according to the cultural cognition of young, middle-aged and old) then we find that those in the 16-35 age group consist of young husband



and wife teams most of whom have set up their separate households. At this age they cannot have adult children to share their work and hence the burden of work falls naturally onto the husband and wife. The real differentiation of capacity to work comes in the extended households, and this is where we find persons in the second age group contributing maximum by way of work. Those in the age group of 35-55 are the most efficient in the traditional technology, these are the ones who have acquired the right maturity to be well versed on the intricacies of the traditional mode of washing and ironing clothes and are yet able-bodied. Those above this age become less productive due to infirmity and old age. Those below this age group are not fully equipped for traditional work because they have not yet reached the maturity and experience required for peak performance. Most of the young people, especially boys who are literate, show a marked laziness and even incompetence for traditional work. Even when they have to work, the standard of work does not come up to the expectations of the elders as well as the clients. Another decisive factor is that there is not enough work to occupy their full energies—most young persons whose parents are yet able-bodied are required to only help part time and not take on full adult work.

In fact a man takes on full adult work and starts performing to his full capacity only after he gets married and separates his household. In fact this may be one of the reasons why most households in the 'biradari' are nucleated in the sense that they form a separate work and consumption unit. Residence in most cases is under the same roof with one's parents and brothers with whom one has separated for purpose of work, clients and 'chullah'. The production goods, as already mentioned, are in most cases shared, which is reasonable to expect, since they were built with household contributions in the first place.

Here we have a special form of the domestic group, where individual units are separate for the purposes of work, clientelle and consumption but cooperate in the buying, maintenance and use of capital goods and live under the same roof.

The initiative for separation can come from the middle aged

father who realises that his adult sons are not contributing as much to the household economy as they should. He then separates his sons—giving them few of his clients or none at all—the son then has to look for his own work and build up his own clientele. The son can also take the initiative to separate, where he does not want to live under the authority of an ageing father, in a situation where his contribution of labour is more, yet authority in choosing what is to be consumed is less in the household. Given that the authority in organization of work is diffuse, there are certain limitations when a son is working with his father, like for example, he cannot go off to a movie when there is work pending.

Most often before a son takes the decision to separate he builds up his separate clientele, either by attending to a few

TABLE 16

Total number of households	—102
Number of joint households	—40
Number of nuclear households	—62

WITH REFERENCE TO THE NUCLEAR HOUSEHOLDS,  
WHO TOOK THE DECISION TO SEPARTE ?

Son			Father/mother		
28			12		
In each of these situations whether they got clients or not ?	got clients	did not get clients	N. A.	got clients	did not get clients
	2	22	6	10	2
Brothers after death of father			Consensus between father and sons		
10			12		
	got clients	did not get clients	N. A.	got clients	did not get clients
	8		2	2	4

clients of his father on his own, or by taking on work that comes his way, like of a hotel or hospital, so that he does not have to depend on his father after he separates.

Referring to the table 16 we see that in most cases where the son has taken the decision to separate he has not been given any clients by his father.

TABLE 17

## REASONS FOR DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD

Lack of physical space	-15
Quarrels over work and money either between the men or between the women	-38
Reasons not clear	-7
Death of father	-1
Shifting of household from one place to another	-1

Brothers most often choose to separate after the death of their parents (if they have not done so already) for without the overall authority of the parents, the chances of conflict between brothers increase greatly. Quite often, especially in case of lack of physical space the parents and sons mutually reach upon a consensus to separate households and it becomes a matter of necessity rather than an emotional issue. The rational choice involved in separation is evident, since the households, even after separation, cooperate in the sharing of production goods and continue to live in a fair degree of harmony under the same roof. Physical separation takes place only when the household becomes too big or some radical differences of opinion occur between the members. The women cooperate in looking after each other's children or even in household tasks: when one daughter-in-law is in her menstruation period and cannot do the cooking the other daughter-in-law may do her share of the cooking. Similarly if one person is sick the other helps. The most obvious advantage of separation is a greater utilization of the energy resources of adult members which are not exploited to their fullest extent in a joint household. A son is separated only after he is married, for an

unmarried man cannot form a separate work unit for as already made clear an adult male and female form the minimum workable unit which can function normally.

Several characteristics of the dhobi productive system now emerge. The tools and techniques used as well as the simple system of division of labour and household based work organization are similar to what Marshall Sahlins calls DMP and which applies to both primitive and peasant societies. However, as Scott Cook has already pointed out, the modes of production (the relationships of production) are to be distinguished from simple work organization as such, the former characterizing the overall system of division of labour, distribution and allocation prevalent in whole societies, while work organization is a more microcosmic specific label applied to individual productive groups within the total system. As has been pointed out earlier, the dhobi productive system has striking resemblance to the DMP though it would be too ambitious to label it as a Mode of Production which has much wider connotations.

However, in view of the resemblance to DMP it would be interesting to note some further characteristics of a DMP and its applicability to the dhobi productive system.

As clearly demonstrated by Sahlins, a DMP is an under productive system in the sense that the system does not realise its own potential. In other words there is a wastage of resources and since at the level of DMP labour is the most important resource, there is under use of labour power. Now this fact has been demonstrated in our case 1) by the gap between the number of actually worked clothes with the potential number that can be washed, 2) by the fact that larger work groups are less productive than smaller ones, 3) by the relatively small peak productive cycle in an individual's life.

Now this fact of underproduction is partly related to certain inherent features of the productive system (which also coincide with similar characteristics of DMP) like simple technology, rudimentary division of labour and lack of authority in controlling and directing the process of production and partly the articulation of the dhobi organization of work with the total economic network like the number of clients number of clothes given by clients rates of work etc

The latter aspect has to do with the fact that the dhobi productive system is not a complete mode of production, especially where production is equated with provisioning. The dhobis obtain their livelihood not by producing what they consume but by exchanging their labour with money and then buying their requirements from the market. Their level of work is to a degree conditioned by the forces of supply and demand etc. that operate in the total market network of which they are a part. This fact has been given recognition by Shalins himself, that even in the most primitive societies some exchange does take place, but what is important is that we distinguish between production for use value and production for exchange value i.e. the economy sets different goals for itself. Now this point of view clearly takes the stand that the economic objectives of those placed in the DMP are different from those who are oriented towards a 'profit motivation' or towards 'maximization'.

For the dhobis as we had made clear earlier, we have taken the stand that they are rational individuals striving towards maximization. However, this individual rationality is conditioned by the 'biradari' concept, the social rationality. Thus when dhobis outright reject the incorporation of new technology or deny the possibility of altering the traditional mode of production in any way, they are not acting as if their goal is only subsistence and they do not require to produce any more but by the implicit realization that the traditional mode of work organization is geared to the relationships that maintain the 'biradari'—the economic cooperation, the close living, the specific culture that is associated with the traditional occupation.

The fact that the traditional productive system by the very characteristics of a DMP is an underproductive system geared only to subsistence production is incidental to the fact of the 'biradari'. The rationality of the individual lies in choosing between the 'biradari' and its associated system of production and the uncertainties of stepping outside the 'biradari' by doing away with the traditional system of occupation. The fact that individuals made all out efforts to improve their economic position, by change of clientelle, by taking up part time occupations, and even by changing their occupation but in a way that does not completely endanger their membership of the 'biradari', goes

towards demonstrating that individuals are maximizing to the best of their abilities. This individual rationality is however circumscribed by the rationality embodied in the 'biradari' as an institution.



## EXCHANGE

In the earlier chapters we have discussed the productive organization of the dhobis as forming a self-contained system having certain characteristics of its own—it is the specific characteristic of this system that identifies the dhobi economy as a distinct entity analyzable in itself. However, this system is articulated by a network of economic relationship to the total economic nexus. These are all the exchange relationships that dhobis have. Some of these relationships extend outside the 'biradari', while some within it and accordingly the nature of the relationship, and the type of exchange that takes place, varies. "Exchange ... refers to the various processes by which goods (and services) move between individuals and groups, as for example, between producer and consumer, buyer and seller, donor and recipient" (Cook, 1973, p. 823).

Different types of exchanges have been listed by different authors, e.g. Malinowski, Polanyi, Sahlins etc. The basic premise of an exchange is that something is always exchanged for something else. No giving in the economic sense is completely altruistic. However, the nature of the exchange and the type of goods material or non-material that are exchanged are con-  
du-



tioned not only by economic considerations of equivalence, profit and loss, but also by social and cultural factors such as status positions, customary behaviours etc.

Here we shall consider mainly three types of exchanges : a) reciprocal, in terms of what Marshall Sahlins would call 'balanced reciprocity', where goods and services are exchanged on the basis of a mutual agreement, of long term equivalence either in material or in kind : b) ceremonial, which is only an extension of the first type of exchange since the relationships that are involved are more or less the same as in the reciprocal form—only the occasions are different and so is the manner of exchange. The third type, c) is the market exchange in which there is a direct exchange of goods and services in terms of the market principles of supply, demand and equivalence. However, the last named does not always occur in its pure form i.e. in terms of totally instrumental and tangential kind of relationship of buyer and seller but is mitigated by principles of the first two kinds of exchange mainly through the establishment of what Foster calls 'dyadic relationships' (Foster, 1967, pp. 213-230) within the 'biradari' and outside of it. We also find elements of the redistributive type of exchange but only present in a modified form—in the lottery networks and in the collection of tribute by 'panchayat' and consequent lending out to 'biradari' members.

The first two kinds of exchange take place mainly within the 'biradari' for it involves that type of exchanges where the 'social' aspect is primary and the 'economic' aspect secondary in the deal. Purely reciprocal exchanges are an aspect of the 'biradari' life and involve mutual exchange of services and cooperation in sharing of productive goods as have been already discussed in the chapter on 'biradari'. What is important here is that primarily social relationships like that of kin, 'biradari' and neighbourhood are utilized for mutually beneficial economic gains. And while nowhere is the relationship defined in economic terms, yet the individuals never lose sight of the economic aspect of such mutual exchange. For example, in the sharing of production goods, it is normally taken care that only those who had earlier contributed to the purchase of it, should also have rights of use. Such that, individuals even after they separate their households in terms of consumption and work use the produc

tion goods and also contribute towards its maintenance. Unless contribution is made towards maintenance, sharing may cause conflict. In one case, where in a household, only one brother had contributed towards the purchase of some production goods, the other brothers and their sons had to pay a small rent for the use of such goods.

Mutuality and not charity is the norm and there is fairly high consciousness about equivalence in terms of value of even such goods like labour and time. In fact it is ideas about equivalence of contribution that cause conflicts in joint households about work inputs of different members. Idle or non-earning members unless they are too young or old and infirm, are resented.

Equivalence within the 'biradari' is judged not only by the nature and quantity of service rendered but also by the social relationship between the parties concerned. If a man's paternal kin (F, FBS, BS) or even his own brothers help him in work, it is always on the understanding that there is going to be reciprocal services in kind, whenever the other party needs it. In fact, some kind of a mental charge sheet is maintained regarding such mutual service. The brother-brother bond is of equality in status and mutual in terms of rights and services.

Clearly, there is an inequality of status between the wife givers and wife receivers—the latter always being on the receiving end, according to the cultural ideals. Thus at the time of need, the affinal relatives of a man especially his WB are always ready with help and a woman's natal household owe it to her, to render help at any time. The brother-sister bond is one of great affection and consequently to safeguard the happiness of his sister a brother maintains extremely cordial relations, at least overtly, with his ZIL. Any help received by a man from his affinal kin is not expected to be compensated, but meals may be provided to the helpers out of cordiality and affectivity that the relationship entails.

Married daughters are regarded as the property of their affinal household and as such it is her affines who have rights over her services. But due to the bond of affection existing between daughters and parents, she may often help out her parental household with work at times of need. But because her natal household is making use of her labours value on which they no

longer have a right, compensation is made in cash and kind. The quantity of gifts given is not weighed out against the amount of work done by her, it is determined by custom and economic status of parents. Normally, it consists of a set of clothes and a little cash, Rs. 11/- or Rs. 21/-. However, a son even though he may set up a separate hearth after marriage, belongs to his father's lineage and owes duty towards his father, who is still the ideological head of the household. Help from a son to his father need not be compensated but regarded as due.

The idea of equivalence also dominates ceremonial exchanges but here another very important factor intervenes, namely that of prestige within the 'biradari'. Unlike the individual or household based day-to-day reciprocities, the ceremonial exchanges or gift givings take place in full view of the 'biradari' and as already mentioned, conspicuous consumption and generosity in giving on ceremonial occasions enhances prestige within the 'biradari', so that an individual's loss in monetary terms is compensated by his gain in status.

Ceremonial exchange takes place on all occasions of rites-de-passage in the life of a member of the 'biradari', of these the most elaborate occasion is marriage. At the occasion of marriage, two different kinds of gifts are given. One is in the form of the bridal dowry, or gifts to the bridegroom and the other in form of 'nyota' (gifts).

The dowry consists of all the gifts given to the bride and her affinal household by her natal household and immediate kin and the 'nyota' are the gifts that the invitees to the wedding bring for the 'bride' or groom. The former are the presentations given to the bride and groom that are pooled together by her immediate natal kin. Each person makes a contribution according to his capacity and the norm is that one should contribute the maximum that one can. The idea here is not of equivalence but rather of prestige in the 'biradari' and love for the bride and nearer and dearer relatives give more. Even here, a person is expected to give according to his or her economic status and not only by the closeness of the relationship.

The second type of gifts at marriage i.e. 'nyota' are representative of solidarity of the 'biradari' as a group and consists of gifts mostly in terms of small cash that all invitees bring **Nyota"**

is a part of all Hindu marriages and here the idea is of equivalence but in such a way that one party always remains a debtor and the relationship is never balanced. The norm is to make a conscientious note of all the gifts that come, and when there is a wedding in the household of the individual who has made the gift, care is taken to return a little more than what has been given in the first place. This makes sure that the relationship continues. However, amongst the dhobis since 'everyone' was invited to every wedding, this idea of giving a little more, was not necessary, because relationships are cemented by 'biradari' ties and the gift given is a correlate of the 'biradari' relationships and not vice versa, i.e. where gift giving sustains relationships.

However, even within the 'biradari' some relationship may be of a 'dyadic' nature of 'colleague' (Foster, 1967, p. 216) type and here the mutual gift giving may be a little more than what is warranted by mere ties of 'biradari'. And also such 'nyota' relationships may exist outside the core 'biradari' to such levels of the 'biradari' as do not form the list of essential invitees to a wedding. These may be with other resident dhobis of Delhi or even the Muslim dhobis. In interaction with individual outside one's core 'biradari' true 'nyota' norms are maintained in terms of carefully balanced 'non equivalence', for complete equivalence would mean breaking up of the relationship.

The gifts given to the bride at her wedding are given as dowry to her, but dowry amongst the dhobis does not have the same implications as amongst the high caste Hindus amongst whom it takes the form of elaborate presentations to the affinal household of the bride, with considerable shares going to her affinal kin, especially the bridegroom's father. Here the gifts are given to the bride by her natal kin and they are such articles as are of use to her and her husband especially when setting up their own separate hearth. Traditionally, the dowry of a dhobi girl consisted mainly of an iron, some utensils, usually five in number, some jewellery and one or two sets of clothes.

With the changing times the quantum of gifts has gone up very high. The following is a list of gifts given to a bride at a wedding in 1977, with the relationship of the person who gave them, to the bride :

- Father — 1 cot  
           5 utensils  
           1 steel almirah  
           1 gold necklace  
           1 pair gold earrings  
           1 pair gold bracelets  
           1 gold 'tikka'  
           1 gold ring for the bridegroom  
           1 suit of cotton-terylene for bridegroom
- FZe<sub>1</sub> — 5 utensils  
           silver anklets  
           1 gold ring for groom
- FZe<sub>2</sub> — 1 dressing table  
           5 utensils
- FZy — 1 table fan  
           1 gold nose ring  
           1 gold finger ring for boy  
           1 expensive banarsi saree  
           5 utensils
- FBe — 1 sofa set
- Be — 1 bicycle  
           1 wrist watch for groom
- MZe — 1 pair gold bangles  
           1 saree  
           1 clock  
           1 gold finger ring for boy

A look at this list shows us that there are no hard or fast rules about gift giving. In terms of cultural norms FBe is the person who is in a kinship relationship closest to the bride but it is the FZy, in this case, who had contributed the maximum by way of gifts—understandably because she is the most well to do amongst the close relatives. This illustrates well the idea that one must make the maximum contribution one can.

All these gifts are given at a ceremony called 'pair puja', literally 'feet worship', where the bride and groom are made to sit in the bride's house on low stools, and starting with the parents, all their relatives come one by one, and touch their feet, anoint them with turmeric paste and present the gifts that they have brought. Usually the number of persons who make these gifts

comes to nearly fifty or more, for these include all recognized kin.

All of them do not make expensive gifts and some may give only Rs. 2/-. In the above mentioned wedding the total gifts collected amounted to forty nine utensils, eleven gold ornaments, eight silver ornaments along with a variety of other items like clocks, watches, mirrors, plastic baskets and decoration objects and about Rs 400/- in cash. It must be mentioned that the cash and other gifts also come as part of the 'nyota' gifts—from all those people who do not take part in the 'pair puja' i.e. who do not come within the kin category included in the list for participating in the 'pair puja' ceremony. It actually leaves out few individuals from the 'biradari', invited to the girl's side (the rest are part of the boy's party) and the 'nyota' comes mostly from individuals from outside the core 'biradari'—friends with whom one has a 'dyadic' relationship.

Of all the reciprocal gift exchange relationship the 'nyota' relationships are the only ones that extend outside the 'biradari'. It is interesting to note that in earlier times the Muslim dhobis formed a large number of 'nyota' relationships with the sheheri dhobis but now such relationships are increasingly being withdrawn and extended towards non-dhobi Hindu castes by the sheheri dhobis.

Another factor here is that the kind of gifts that are given are also the kind that would be of the greatest day to day use. The gifts at a girl's wedding are such that ultimately help her set up a new household, for at the time of separation of hearths the dowry items are what a young couple get. To a boy, the gifts are mainly in cash, for the boy's side does not have to give any gifts but they spend a lot on feasting and items of display like musical band etc. From the contribution of his kin group a large part of this expense is covered. Thus the wedding expenses which are the heaviest expenses in the life time of an individual, are more or less a pooled effort on the part of the kin. Since those who are economically better off will contribute a good share towards the gifts and expenses at a wedding of a kin and since the prestige of a household is measured by the scale of expenses at which the rites-de-passage are carried out the status of the household with well to do

kin connections would be enhanced.

The combined effort by all members of the 'biradari' to spend more at occasions of conspicuous consumption has effect, not only in enhancing status of individual households/kin groups within the 'biradari' but also of the 'biradari' as a whole interse other groups. Just like the referent of prestige of individual households, is the core biradari, that of the 'biradari' as a whole, is of the outer limits of the 'biradari' i.e. the other dhobi groups. It is a reflection on the comparative extravagance of the sheheri dhobis that other dhobi sub-castes such as the 'purbia' and the Muslims recognize them to be rich as compared to their own selves.

The motivation for spending is dual, on the one hand to raise status of individual household/kin group and on the other hand to raise status of 'biradari' as a whole. The latter is a reflection of primary group sentiments for the 'biradari', where the interest of the 'biradari', is equivalent to an individual's personal interest.

An extension of the same sentiments of concern for the 'biradari' prestige is the recent ban imposed by the panchayat on public drinking and dancing during marriage celebrations, for the unssemlly conduct of the drunken members of the marriage party are deemed to be a blot on the 'biradari' name and prestige.

Apart from the marriage of a daughter, gifts are also sent to her affinal household on important calendrical rituals or festival days. These expenses are borne by her immediate family of orientation. As long as the father of a girl is alive, he makes these gifts with contribution from such sons as are still part of the household. As soon as the sons separate their hearths, their obligations to contribute towards the gifts being sent to their sisters ceases. Since the youngest son is the one to inherit whatever possessions the parents leave behind and to step into the father's shoes, he also has ultimate obligations to give gifts to his sisters on ritual occasions. As a woman settles down in her affinal household, the scale of gifts made to her reduces considerably and after several years of marriage may become quite nominal.

The d quantity of gift givmg is a phenomenon of

recent times, partly in imitation of higher caste groups, and partly due to changing standard of evaluation of status within the 'biradari'. Traditionally and culturally, there was no pressure on the woman's side to provide her with substantial dowry. No demands could be made by the man's side upon the woman's household in this respect. The idea was to give just enough to a woman so that she and her husband could set up an independent household and survive in the traditional occupation—five utensils for the kitchen, one iron for ironing clothes, one or two sets of clothes, and few pieces of jewellery were the basic requirements of dowry—anything over and above this was (and still is) optional.

This can be related to the recognized economic value of the women. The labour and other physical value of women far outweigh anything that could come by way of gifts in a dowry. Further the overall 'biradari' network tends to equalise relationships since the groom's side, as well as the bride's side, are tied to each other through multiple kin ties, and dowry does not bridge the status gap between bride giver and receiver. However, the inequality of status is given implicit recognition by the fact that marriage rules prescribe only a one-way movement of women, that is wife givers and wife receivers cannot change position. Repeated marriages (in the same direction) can however take place, that is a woman can go into the same household in which her FZ has gone. Due to the smallness of the marriage circle, restricted by 'biradari', any prescribed categories exist only for first order kin and not for second and third order kin.

An interesting example can be cited here of the compromise brought about between equality of status in the 'biradari'/kin relations and inequality of status between wife givers and wife receivers. Normatively, amongst the Hindus of the Northern region—which includes our field area—the status of wife givers is such that it forbids them to partake of any food at the house of wife receivers. But amongst the dhobis, there is a paradox that wife givers, being of the same 'biradari' have to be treated like fellow 'biradari' men with cordiality when they make a visit to the wife receivers house. And since cordiality amongst dhobis is normally expressed through the



offering of food and drinks, it poses a problem. The solution has been brought about by offering the women's relatives alcoholic beverages instead of food by the simple tongue in cheek logic that if they cannot eat, they can certainly drink.

Outside the 'biradari' and friendship circle, the dhobis are tied with market exchange relationships of buyer and seller. However, here also we find a gradation in the quality of the relationship depending upon the nature of the exchange conditioned by who the partners in the relationship are, e.g. dhobi-client relationships are of a different quality than dhobi-shopkeeper relationships.

Apart from marriage, other rites-de-passage are birth of a child, 'mundan' or the headshaving ceremony of a boy and "death". The birth of a child, especially the first child calls for celebrations and a flow of gifts from the natal household of a woman to her affinal household. The household in which the birth has taken place sends sweets to the households of all its women married into other households. They, and their husbands have also to be invited and treated to a meal. The natal household of the mother sends gifts (chochak) to the new born child. These customarily consist of clothes and a few pieces of jewellery for the child and clothes for its parents. In fact, for the natal household of a woman, the gifts given at the birth of her first child are part of the series of occasions on which gifts have to be sent to a daughter's household after her marriage. Another occasion is 'karba chauth'—a ritual occasion devoted to fasting and prayers by married women for their husbands. And Holi, and Diwali, both of them being Hindu festivals.

The 'mundan' ceremony is a simply conducted ceremony in which the barber, who is called to shave the head of the child, is given money and clothes. The members of the immediate kin group are given a meal.

Death is an important rite-de-passage marking the transit of an individual from the 'biradari'. The death of an individual causes pollution in the household and all members become impure. After cremating the body according to Hindu rites the members of the household have a ritual bath and a 'brahmin' is called to perform purificatory rites and is given some utensils sets of clothes and some money and he is also fed. This is the only

ceremony amongst the dhobis which calls for participation of the 'brahmin', essential to absorb the pollution of death and is the only exchange involving ritual services.

Exchange of service for cash in the traditional form, entailed a personalization of the relationship which gave it a character different from the totally individualistic, pragmatic, profit oriented relationship of the market. Here we refer to market exchange and relationship as an abstract concept in definitional terms and not in terms of a real relationship, because in reality even the most advanced form of market relationship may be found mitigated by some degree of personalization. This included both types of exchanges, one in which the dhobis exchanged their own service for remuneration, and one in which they employed the services of others.

The former, in the traditional milieu took the form of 'jajmani' relationships to clients in the sense of attachment to individual households in social and ritual terms—in addition to the economic exchange of service for cash. The jajmani relationship in the cities did not have the organizational structure of jajmani in the villages, Kolenda (1963), Lewis and Barnow (1956). It was a part market exchange relationship through the use of cash money and variable rates of washing and part traditional relationship with ritual and social components, fringe benefits provided by the clients, continuation of relationship between clients and dhobi and comparative inflexibility of rates.

From the earliest days, the dhobis had been interacting with their clients on a face-to-face, informal basis with number of fringe benefits thrown in—the latter depending upon the socio-economic status of the client. One 90 year old informant recalled how he used to collect wood shavings from inside the Red Fort while the British soldiers were lodged there. He washed the clothes of the contractor in charge of carpentry, who would allow him to enter, under strict security condition, to collect the wood shavings which were used either in the 'bhatti' or for domestic fuel. Some clients even offer or help in finding jobs for the dhobis or their children. A man, about 45 years of age, regretted that he had not accepted the offer of a British Sahib, whose clothes he used to wash for a salaried job. His reason for rejection then was that he was the eldest son and in charge

of most of the washing in his household. One youth who was employed as bank clerk said that his father who washes the uniforms of bank employees, was offered, by the bank officials, a job for any of his sons who could get educated and after doing his B. Com., this son was given a job in fulfilment of that promise. Traditionally, dhobis tended to form reciprocal kind of relationships by the attachment to individual households, a relationship that at times spanned several generations.

This relationship was expressed in many ways, some of which still persist between old dhobis and their clients. In many households of clients—an old dhobi/dhoban may be addressed by fictive kinship terms like 'bhai saheb' (brother) or 'bhabhiji' (sister-in-law). The Muslim clients address the dhobi woman as 'bahu' (daughter-in-law) 'amma' (mother) or 'khala' (FZ). One elderly dhobi woman said that her clients call her mummy, most of them put the suffix 'ji', to denote respect, like 'dhobiji' or 'dhobanji'. That an old dhobi may be called as a bonafide member of the family is exemplified by the statement of one elderly dhobi who has as his clients conservative 'baniya' households, that the daughters-in-law of his clients' households observe 'purdah' from him and do not speak to him directly, a form of behaviour adapted towards elderly affinal male relatives. According to another dhobi, 61 years of age, "I had gone to the household of one of my old clients, when one of the daughters-in-law, who had been newly married, came and complained about the quality of washing not being adequate. Her husband came upon the scene and scolded her by saying that now 'dhobiji' has become old, he cannot work as well as he could, that does not mean that she could scold him and that he would wash just as he pleased and she had no business to scold him. The new bride burst into tears and left the scene. From then onwards she never complained about my work".

This kind of relationship is however rare and exists mostly between old dhobis and some of their clients. Under present conditions both clients and dhobis have changed. Most clients favour the dhobi only to the extent that he delivers the goods. Many of the younger generation of dhobis are also rebellious against the servile attitude expected of them towards clients in the traditional kind of relationship. They would rather forego

the fringe benefits and insist upon better rates and equal treatment. According to one young man, "those clients who show very good behaviour towards the dhobi are also the ones who are likely to cheat them in accounting." Most traditional dhobis being illiterate had to depend upon their clients to do the accounting for payments.

There is a decided change in attitude towards the dhobi from conservative, traditional households to modern ones. In answer to the question as to whether they were invited to any function such as marriage at their clients' house—the following answers were obtained.

TABLE 18

Q. ARE YOU INVITED TO ANY FUNCTION AT YOUR CLIENTS' HOUSE ?

N = 102

Yes	No
43	40

(17 households have clientelle among the hotels, hospitals, banks etc.)

N.R. = 2

Those who were invited at their client's house, maintained that only the old and long standing clients call them. These are mostly the Baniya, Jain and Muslim clients who live in the interior of Old Delhi and are part of the old population of the city. The Punjabis who came late upon the scene maintain only a pragmatic relationship with the dhobis. Also such dhobis whose clientelle consist of poorer households such as of petty shopkeepers or other low castes are not invited to their client's house, understandably because the clients themselves are in no position to invite them. Those dhobis who live in New Delhi, either live in servant quarters or near rich and modern households, who invite them in many instances to do work—like ironing clothes of wedding guests etc. Some dhobi youth do not themselves like to attend any function at their client's house. As one of them put it, "for them a dhobi is a dhobi, and they invite us not as kin or friend but only to get work done out of us". However, the ones who are invited are also given some

gifts—in some instances it may only be in form of the left over food.

Only some tradition bound clients having long standing relationships with their dhobis may give generously—gifts including food, clothes and cash. One old dhobi said that his clients—who are rich Jains—call him from his house at all functions, reprimand him if he is late. Recently at the birth of a son they had gifted him with clothes worth Rs. 150/-. Such generosity is very rare and normally Muslim clients give uncooked food and Hindu clients give left over food along with small cash gifts to the denomination of Rs. 2/- or Rs. 5/-. Few give more than Rs. 11/-. This is in contrast to the traditional times when clients always gave gifts to the dhobis at ritual occasions and sometimes quite generously, especially by the Muslim clients.

Some clients, especially rich, treat the dhobis with a fair degree of generosity and help them in times of need, though not necessarily with disadvantage to themselves. Money loaned out to the dhobi is deducted from payments due to him. An old bicycle or discarded clothes, books etc. may be handed over to him. One dhobi woman said that she had put her children in school only at the instance of her mistress, who had got the necessary uniforms and books for the child. If a client has a shop, he may give any goods he is selling on credit or on instalments or may get the payment from the dhobi in terms of clothes washed rather than cash.

To the fact of generosity is added the obvious status difference between client and dhobi which makes the latter act in a manner gratifying to the clients. The difference in behaviour adapted by the dhobis towards their clients is directly proportionate to the status of the clients e.g., while for the better off and regular clients they carry the clothes to and fro, the smaller clients have to give their clothes at the dhobi's house and take them back. The manner of address and attitude which is humble and servile towards richer clients may be disrespectful and indifferent towards poor clients. Thus what the richer clients give materially is accounted for by the status gap.

By and large, the change in the relationship between dhobi and client from a dyadic kind of relation involving active kinship solicitousness and mutual regard (though in the form of a

master-servant relationship) to a primarily pragmatic, economic relationship which goes little beyond the specific economic transfer involved, is due partly to the change in function of the dhobi from social ritual and economic services to mainly economic service. The extra benefits given by the clients were largely to compensate for the ritual and social significance of the dhobi's work, in terms of absorption of pollution, servile status etc.

The emphasis on the economic dimensions now-a-days is reflected in the case with which even long standing clients break off from the dhobis, something which was not done in earlier times. The reasons for which a client mainly terminated the relationship was damages to clothes or consistently late delivery. The dhobi may himself break off if the client does not give money in time or does not raise rates.

TABLE 19  
REASONS FOR BREAK IN RELATIONSHIP

<i>Break off from client's side</i>			<i>Break off from dhobi's side</i>	
Damage/loss/ late delivery of clothes	Dispute over rates	Work usurped by other dhobi	Non/late payment by client	Other reasons like change of residence or switch over of work by dhobi
41	10	7	6	14
N = 102			N.R. = 24	

The relatively much higher incidence of break off initiated by clients, indicates that in the exchange between clients and dhobis, the clients have the upper hand in the relationship, to break or continue it. According to the dhobi informants the richer clients do not care for small damages to clothes and consequently do not break off relationship as readily as the smaller and poorer clients. Some long standing clients have the understanding with the dhobis that he should pay half the cost of the damage done; sometimes the clients will get equivalent amount of washing to cover up the cost of the damage. Though the dhobi uses money in such a transaction yet he

prefers to cover up cost of damage rather than lose a client—for clients are scarce and the dhobi finds it difficult to contact new ones.

This is another aspect of the dhobi-client relationship. It is much easier for a client to get hold of a new dhobi rather than for a dhobi to get hold of a new client. A client can simply hail a dhobi from the streets or go to a dhobi 'katra' to contact one or ask a neighbour to pass him his dhobi but it is both unseemly and unfruitful for a dhobi to go from house to house trying to get new clients. Practically the only way in which dhobis can get new clients is through proper references through the old clients.

The assymetry of the relationship is reflected also in the payment of dues. A dhobi cannot take any action against a client for non-payment of dues. There is no system of informal sanction to ensure that a dhobi gets payment from a client. They have to leave it to the honesty of the payer. If a client delays payment, the dhobi, if hard pressed for money, may pawn some household goods or else, borrow from some source but he cannot coerce his client into paying up. Conversely, the client, because of his superior social status and economic position can threaten the poor and illiterate dhobi into paying up to the client any damages or dues.

According to one dhobi informant, twenty five of the sarces he had spread out to dry on the Jamuna 'ghat' were stolen and he had to pay his client Rs 2,500/-at the average rate of Rs 100/-per saree. According to another, "the clients are sometimes dishonest about payment. If you wash 10 clothes they say you have washed only five. If any cloth is lost they may stop payment. I lost one saree of one client and he deducted the price from my dues. In another instance I went to deliver clothes to a client and he kept them and did not pay me, saying that the clothes were delivered too late. I told him that I fell sick but he did not relent, so I left his work and did not even tell any one to go and get clothes from him."

Many dhobis complained about the lack of unity amongst dhobis which enabled the clients to have an edge over them. The dhobis do not have any trade union type organization and the separation of sub-castes in terms of marriage and interaction also makes any kind of unity difficult. Moreover there are always

the migrant dhobis and laundry shops, which are anyway outside the social circle of the city dhobis.

Due to their inferior position in the exchange relationship, the dhobis have to put up with many inconveniences which include collecting the clothes from the houses of the clients and delivering them back, unlike the laundry and drycleaning shops where the client has to himself go and give and collect the clothes. The dhobi may have to travel long distances on foot, or go by cycle or bus to collect clothes from far off clients. It is a reflection on the situation of difficulty of obtaining new clients that dhobis who were earlier situated in Old Delhi and who have been displaced to New Delhi and trans-Jamuna colonies, still travel long distances to come and collect clothes from their former clients.

Though some dhobis thought it quite proper that they should collect clothes from their clients since, "they are big people and we are small", many others resented the arrangement but admitted that there was no way out. According to one young woman, "you have to bring clothes from house to house, even if you are sick and you ask them to come down and give the clothes, tell them you are not able to climb the stairs, they will say no, you come up and take them. Whether you are sick or it is sunny or it is raining, you have to collect and deliver clothes, otherwise the client will get some other dhobi".

Similarly, increasing of rates is largely dependent upon the discretion of the clients. In answer to the question as to 'what rates they are charging for washing and ironing?' most of the informants quoted different rates. The rates for ironing ranged from 10 paise to 25 paise per piece and that of washing and ironing from 20 paise to 40 paise per piece. The different sizes and fabrics also called for different rates. In 1971 the All India Dhobi Association, formally raised and fixed the rates and a circular was issued to dhobi panchayats to this effect. But neither dhobis nor clients adhere to the given rates and these are manipulated according to the situation. Decisions are taken by the dhobi according to his needs. If he has enough work at hand he will leave a client who does not increase rates but if he is needy he will agree to work at lower rates.

Sometimes the dhobis accept different rates from different



clients—depending upon their relationship to the clients, the kind of fringe benefits they derive from him, the kind of clothes he gives—too dirty, clean, heavy or light—the degree to which they can manipulate him. The main problem with the dhobi is that he cannot afford to lose too many clients. He also does not have a withholding power, to go without work for a few days. The proceeds from his work go into his food and washing inputs. The general answer to the question regarding increase of rates and reaction of clients was that only if the client willingly accepts to increase rates can the dhobi increase it, more often a client will threaten to give the work to another who works at lower rates.

TABLE 20  
INCREASE OF RATES AND RESPONSE OF CLIENTS

<i>Have you increased your rates any time in the past ?</i>			<i>Have your clients offered any resistance to the rates being increased ?</i>		
Yes	No.	N.A.	Protested* verbally but increased	Refused to increase and gave to other dhobi	Did not protest
65	16	17	15	21	29

\*Note : This of course applies to only some of the clients of a dhobi otherwise the dhobi would be left without any work.

Sometimes the dhobi, especially if he is strong in body and capable of doing good work may hold out against clients to get his own rates. According to one young informant, "I increased my rates from 25 paise to 30 paise, some clients agreed, while others did not, so I washed clothes of some for 25 paise and others for 30 paise. But to some clients, who said that I should reduce my rates to 20 paise because some other dhobis were washing for that rates, I told to go get their clothes washed from those other dhobis".

If a client gives his work to another dhobi, there is little a dhobi can do about it. Rarely will a dhobi fight to retain a client like a young man who washed the uniforms of a musical

band company from a very young age, and had only that client and no other for his livelihood, said, "I wanted them to increase my rates by 10 paise but they said they will give the work to another dhobi so I told them that as long as I am alive I will not let anybody else take this work, so they compromised and increased the rates by 5 paise."

In spite of the imbalanced relationship, most dhobis would still prefer to have clients with personalized relationships. For the dhobis the clients are their only personal links (if such a relation is formed) to the world outside the 'biradari'. A 'dyadic' relationship formed with a client gives them considerable social and economic leverage. The 'biradari' is not adequate to provide him with such help as a job for his son, a television on easy instalments or a loan at the time of need because the members of the 'biradari' are by and large at the same level of poverty, illiteracy and social disadvantage as himself. Even when this is not the case dhobis do not lend (or accept) money to (from) each other. The relationship of debtor/money lender is taboo within the 'biradari' of co-equals. In fact a dhobi's outlook on life and standard of living may reflect to an extent the nature of his clientele. Those catering to richer and higher status clients have a higher standard of living and show greater modernity of outlook rather than those catering to poor and low caste clients. This is partly due to the greater monetary advantage of having richer clients and partly due to exposure to a higher social status via the medium of clientele.

The exchange relationship between dhobis and clients is exemplified in the following diagram :

Service	⇌	money
(dhobi) Servility	⇌	higher status (client)
in interaction		concessions and fringe
		benefits such as gifts, loans
		superior social status

The economic cooperation exhibited in the use of production resources and work organization breaks down when it comes to the acquisition and retention of clients. The attitude expressed in this regard is pragmatic and may be labelled as competitive. Clients now a-days have come to be regarded as a scarce resource under conditions when it has become difficult to get

amount of work. If a client dismisses a dhobi another dhobi is immediately ready to take on his place, sometimes one dhobi will accept lower rates than another, in order to secure a client. In fact it is this practice that is tending to keep the rates down. A dhobi may quote different rates at different times according to his needs. If he is in difficult times he may quote lower rates and thus secure a client for himself and if he has a good amount of work in hand he may quote very high rates, which will either discourage the client or if he accepts, the dhobi will then dispense with some other client for whom he was working for lower rates.

If a dhobi falls sick or is disabled by any reason from doing his work, he rapidly loses his clientele which are grabbed upon by others, often it is one of his own 'biradari' or even one related to him. Near relatives were often accused of luring away clients in times of distress. This attitude towards clients is in marked contrast to the 'biradari' feelings expressed in other matters. The rationale for it is given mainly in terms such as the clients are open to all dhobis—irrespective of which 'biradari' they belong to. Thus if one dhobi does not take on the work of a client who has dismissed a dhobi of his own 'biradari' or relation, then some other dhobi from outside will. This is true in the light of the fact that a large number of dhobis have come to the city after Independence in 1947.

Unlike the dhobi-client exchange, greater equality is present in the situation where dhobis get the services of other dhobis for payments. Although it is rare, yet it happens occasionally, that dhobi with a large amount of work, not able to muster enough labour from his household, employs another dhobi to do his work. Out of the 102 households interviewed, only 4 have felt the necessity of hiring anyone. One 61 years old informant had hired help 15 years ago when his children were young and work was heavy. Another informant has recently employed a dhobi for ironing clothes because his sons are either studying or doing jobs; under similar circumstances another person had employed a 'pressman' for three months during the busy season. One informant who gets work from a hospital and whose sons are doing jobs, kept a dhobi till about a year back.

The dhobis hired are never from the biradari because the

idea of brotherhood within the 'biradari' precludes any relationship of hire and sell. The migrant dhobis who are hired, are also treated as equals and as 'brothers' and given the largesse of the dwelling, they live with their employer and are fed, clothed and treated like a member of the household.

The terms on which these dhobis are employed are, monthly salary, which varies from as 50/- 100/-, food, clothing, place to live and 'bidi', 'paan' etc. The difference in relationship between dhobis and clients and dhobis and hired dhobi are directly related to the fact that while the former is a biradari-non-biradari bond, the latter is a biradari-biradari bond i.e. concerning the outer limits of the 'biradari'. Thus the nature of the exchange relationships is conditioned not only by what is exchanged, service for money, in both the cases, but the respective status of the partners in the exchange.

The exchange of material goods for money, which is the way in which dhobis get their goods, both for personal consumption as well as for production, are part of the market exchange. The dhobis are situated in a complex, commercialised urban market centre and get their goods through an impersonalized exchange from shopkeepers.

However, some kind of permanent buyer-seller relationship with neighbourhood shops can give rise to a degree of personalization of relationship even in the market. Eighteen informants out of fifty who were interviewed for their purchasing activities, replied that they get their supplies from fixed shops, some of the shops being patronised even by their fathers. These shops are generally in the neighbourhood, some belong to Baniyas, others to Punjabis or Jains. Other dhobis go to the whole sale markets at Khari Baoli or Farash Khana where they can determine the general price level, choose from a number of varieties and haggle about the prices.

The decision to buy from a neighbourhood shop or from the wholesale market is conditioned by the quantum of purchase. Only those who buy their goods on a monthly or fortnightly basis, in bulk, go to the wholesale market. Going everyday to a distance and then higgling haggling from shop to shop is a time and energy consuming process not worth it if the quantity to be purchased is small. The ones whose power is not

enough to buy a large amount at a time, make their purchases from the Baniya's shop—one or two of which are adjacent to every dhobi katra.

The disadvantage of buying at the Baniya's shop is that there is no variety or choice as also the price is fixed according to the Baniya and there is not much scope for bargaining about the price. The advantage lies in credit facilities as well as the fact that very small quantities can be bought such as not possible from the whole-sale market.

Purchasing power also depends on the nature of the payment by clients. Those who have clients whose clothes are washed on a monthly basis in bulk and who pay accordingly in lump sums make their purchases as and when they are paid and for the entire period till the next payment is due. Purchasing in bulk ensures that they do not spend the money elsewhere and fall short of money to purchase until they receive the next payment.

For those who get paid on a weekly basis it is convenient to make purchases as and when they receive money so that they do not have to save. For the dhobis it is both difficult to hold cash in hand or to save.

Credit at the shopkeeper is not preferred ; neither is the shopkeeper, knowing the economic status of the dhobi, keen to give credit for large amounts. As and when credit is taken, it is returned according to the weekly or fortnightly cycle in which the dhobi washes and delivers clothes and gets his payment. Even the shopkeeper may be aware of the days in which the dhobi gets his money.

Active discussion takes place between dhobis as to the quality and price of soap at different shops—the shopkeepers are referred to familiarly by name. But the relationship is purely that of business and whenever a dhobi goes out to buy if he has the time to spare he will not hesitate to try out a new locality if he has heard someone praise its merchandise and the price is attractively low.

A more personalized relationship exists between certain traders, too poor to set up shop, but who go from door to door selling their goods. There are permanent buyer-seller relationships between these hawkers and the dhobis and in the exchange

process the seller is ensured of a fixed clientele while the dhobis have the advantage that they get the goods delivered at their door, at cheaper rates than the market and often at credit.

As already mentioned, the dhobis also buy from their client's shops, if they have any, and here the relationship of buyer and seller is superimposed on the dhobi-client relationship with consequent benefits to the dhobis. He gets credit, facility of easy instalments and even the option to pay by service rather than cash.

On the whole, the exchange relationships of the dhobis can be represented as a gradient of which the two poles consist of such relations in which the social aspect dominates over the economic to the other end where economic aspects dominate over social relations.

#### Social

Ceremonial exchange with kin group and 'biradari'.

Reciprocal exchange of service within kin group and 'biradari'.

Exchange of service for cash between dhobi and non kin 'biradari' outside of core 'biradari'.

Exchange of service for cash between dhobi and client.

Exchange of material goods for cash between dhobi and client (shopkeeper).

Exchange of material goods for cash between dhobi and known trader with whom there is fixed buyer-seller relationship.

Exchange of material goods for cash between dhobi and general shopkeeper in the market.

#### Economic

It is evident from above that in such exchanges that take place between two parties tied in 'biradari' ties or extensions of it, the social aspect dominates over the economic. With reference to earlier diagram of 'biradari', we can say that informality shades off into impersonality as the intensity of 'biradari' relationships becomes more diffuse



## CONSUMPTION

Consumption is part of the process of utilization, "As a theoretical category the utilization process encompasses two general types of activities. Those leading to further production and those involving direct, immediate consumption ; or more specifically, those employing resources as capital and those employing resources for direct satisfaction of current wants" (Cook, 1974, p. 838). The former aspect of resource utilization has already been dealt with in our chapter on production ; here we shall be concerned with the latter aspect of utilization, mainly consumption. "In consumption things are embodied in persons (as opposed to production, in which the labour power of persons is embodied in things) and it provides direction to and represents the culmination of the economic process" (Ibid, 839).

The unit of consumption is the household and the very definition of a household in our sample is based upon consideration of household as a unit of consumption, irrespective of residence, cooperation in productive activity and sharing of production goods. The pattern of consumption is conditioned not only by income but also by the value system, the idea of a good life, that we have discussed earlier



The decision that individuals make in consumption are a reflection of cultural values, actual incomes and prices and the goods that are available. Individuals consume not only to satisfy personal desires and needs but to fulfil social norms and expectations. In this chapter we shall discuss the consumption pattern of dhobis under various heads, according to the item of consumption.

### **Food**

Dhobis consume a good amount of staple foods namely wheat and rice. In Delhi, both wheat and rice are obtained from Government licensed Fair Price Shops from which a family draws a fixed quota at fixed prices against ration cards. Dhobi households normally consume the whole quantity of this supply and quite often buy more wheat from the market as well. In addition to wheat and rice, a meal consists of either vegetables or lentils or meat. The normal practice is to cook only one item, i.e., one vegetable dish, meat dish or one pulse, unless it is a festive occasion or guests are to be fed. Understandably the consumption of staple is more or less constant per unit of consumption in all households irrespective of the number of consumption units or the income per consumption unit. This is because a minimum level of staple is required for subsistence and only a certain maximum level of consumption is physiologically possible.

The standard of living of a household is best seen through the expenditures on such items as meat, vegetable and milk. The quantity of meat or vegetables cooked at a time as well as the frequency of cooking meat in the course of a week or month are indicative, to a certain extent, of the standard of living of the household. It is difficult, however, to compute both incomes and expenditures on a regular basis because the dhobis tend to often earn and consume on a day-to-day basis. Whatever a dhobi consumes during the course of a single day is determined by the income on that particular day.

Decisions to consume food are made on the spot and taking an average of consumption over a period (say a week or a month) for any household will show extreme irregularity in the standard of consumption. Where 2 kg of meat (a lavish meal by dhobi standard) is cooked on one day members of the household may

eat only 'chutney' and 'chapati', the extreme of frugality, on the next day. Stability is only in the consumption of basic subsistence food required for survival, i.e. in terms of wheat and rice.

It was observable that as the number of consumption units increase, the expenses on lentils and meat per unit tends to decrease. Since all individuals consume their full ration of wheat and rice, the expenses on these increase as the number of consumption units in a household increase and the budget is balanced by decreasing the consumption of not so essential items (according to dhobis) in terms of meat, milk and vegetables. This again ties in with our earlier observation that the amount of work done (consequently income) does not increase as the number of members of a household increase.

Apart from staple food, vegetables, meat and milk, another important item of expenditure in a dhobi household is on spices, since the dhobis eat heavily spiced food. The expenditure on spices in fact comes out to be much greater than the expenditure on vegetables in any household since spices are also very much more expensive than other food items. In a household where the expense on vegetables was 50 paise a day, the corresponding expenditure on spices (chillies, coriander powder, turmeric powder) was Rs. 2/- per day. Here the cultural values tend to work against nutritional intake since the nutritional values of spices is very much less than that of wholesome food items like vegetables, meat and milk.

Meat is the most desirable food item amongst the dhobis and a meal of meat is a delicacy. But quantitywise the consumption per person is not much, because raw meat of goat i.e. mutton (the meat that is eaten by the dhobis) is available in the market at a high price (the price in 1977 was Rs. 11/- per kg and in 1979 was Rs. 14/- per kg) and the total expenses of cooking 1 kg of meat come to around Rs. 15/- which is very high for the pockets of the dhobis. In most households meat is cooked after 2 or 3 days and in small quantities (500 or 250 gms) e.g. in a household of 15 consumption units, the quantity of meat cooked is 2 kg; in another of 8 consumption units is only 500 gms.

Milk is considered of high food value and necessary for good health but in few households are children provided with sufficient or even any quantity of milk for drinking. Milk is bought only

for preparing tea (the dhobis drink tea at least twice a day) or for giving it to babies. Often children are given milk diluted with water to fill their stomachs. Tea is taken as a stimulant during work, and taken with a pinch of salt is considered to be an antidote against cold. Since the dhobis work a lot in water, they drink fairly large quantities of tea (4-5 cups a day on average per person). Even children are given tea.

The consumption, as far as food items go, is considered sufficient only with regard to staple items such as wheat and rice and at the maximum, with respect to pulses and vegetables. As far as other items like meat, eggs and milk go, the consumption is far less than the aspiration level. Meat has a high preference value amongst food items in the dhobi culture. The rich food value of fruits, milk and eggs is recognized, but the preference for these is not high and the exclusion of these from the diet is not associated with feelings of nutritional deprivation and most often these are referred to as the diet of rich people.

The values regarding food are concentrated mainly on filling the stomach and providing energy for work. The dhobis express the idea, that since they are required to do hard physical labour they require large quantities of staple food (heavy diet) rather than what they consider as 'light diet' of luxury foods such as fruits and milk. Their perception of the relative value and essentiality of various food items is somewhat like the following scale—

- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| Wheat      | — absolutely essential for survival, should be consumed in maximum quantities.   |
| Rice       | — more palatable than wheat as a staple but less energy providing but essential part of diet.  |
| Vegetables | — Essential for taste and as an accompaniment to wheat but little food value recognized.   |
| Lentils    | — Considered equivalent to and substitute for vegetables in terms of taste but a better accompaniment for rice rather than wheat. Same food value is recognized but not in specific terms. |
| Fruits     | — Considered good as food value but not at all essential as part of normal diet. Only a little for sick patients. Not much feeling of deprivation  |

- Milk — Considered essential for good health but not included in adult daily diet because of economic reasons. Feeling of deprivation attached to inability to provide sufficient quantity of milk to children. Not considered as an essential for adult.
- Meat — Considered of very high value in providing energy and warmth to body. Highly palatable, of very high taste value. To be included in diet whenever possible. Feelings of deprivation attached to inability to consume sufficient quantities of meat because of economic reasons.
- Fish — Of not much preference.
- Eggs — Good for providing warmth to body but not essential for daily diet, considered as luxury item.
- Spices — Extremely essential for providing taste to food, without a large quantity of which no cooking is adequate.
- Ghee or oil — Essential for good health and must be included in cooking.

The dhobis always eat richly cooked food with a lot of spices and ghee added. They find boiled or non-spiced food absolutely unpalatable. This may partly be the reason for avoidance of foods such as milk, fruits and eggs, in addition to the overt economic reasons that informants give ; for lack of money does not prevent them from buying large quantities of expensive spices. On the whole, good food amongst the dhobis is equated with tasty and rich food rather than nutritional food regarding which the dhobis have little scientific knowledge.

### Liquor and Tobacco

In fact the economic reasons given for not partaking of certain food items such as milk and fruits is further discredited when we consider the expenses incurred by households on liquor. Although consumption of alcohol weighs heavily on the household economic budget of dhobis, yet, this fact is rarely revealed by informants. General observations and information from key informants puts the estimated average expenditure on liquor at

around Rs. 300/- a month per household. The older generation of dhobis drink regularly but consume the cheap country liquor. Liquor is an essential part of every ritual, ceremonial occasion and entertainment of guests. According to one college educated youth, his mother irons clothes the whole day and at night goes to bed only after drinking quarter of a bottle of liquor. Liquor is synonymous with good company, enjoyment, relation and ceremony in dhobi culture and its consumption is valued only next to staple subsistence food essential for life (Channa, S.)

Though everyone does not drink everyday, they drink whenever they have a kin or friend visiting, which might average at least once a week, and more than one bottle can be opened at such times. Even under the impact of education and modernity, liquor continues to be an item of high consumption value. This is partly due to its functional aspects, like it helps the dhobis stay awake at night when they are looking after the 'bhatti' fire. It also acts as an antidote to cold when they have to work in cold water during winters. Most importantly it stimulates and smoothens out interaction in company—though in the latter case it also brings to surface latent conflict but since fighting while drunk is not considered a recognizable offence within the 'biradari' it acts as a tension releasing mechanism without impairing seriously 'biradari' sentiments.

Some of the modern and educated youth look down upon the drinking habits of their forefathers. For many young persons, the liking has changed merely from drinking cheap country liquor to Indian made foreign liquor like whisky, rum and gin. However, no young man drinks habitually and regularly, like the individuals of forty and above age group. But the regularity of the older generation is balanced by the much more expensive tastes in liquor of the younger generations.

On the whole the drinking of liquor is changing from an item of daily consumption to an item indicative of economic status. Habitual drinking on non-festive occasions has become a luxury and a sign of economic well being. A man who can sit in his home and drink and offer the bottle to his friends is considered a rich man. Drinking of what is popularly known as 'bilayati' (foreign) liquor is the new status symbol in comparison to the common man's 'desi' (local) liquor.

Smoking by adult men is regular though not heavy and most persons smoke the cheap 'bidi' at 20-35 paise per bundle of 10-30 bidies, rather than cigarettes which are comparatively much more expensive (minimum price Rs. 1/- per 10 cigarettes) and serve as a status symbol for the educated and better employed individuals.

## Clothes

Fashionable and expensive clothes have become another important status symbol for the younger set. Traditionally, clothes were regarded mainly as a means towards mere covering of the body and were to be as simple as possible as befitting members of a lowly caste. The dhobis traditionally could not even conceive of dressing like members of the higher castes, the 'big people'. Today, the breaking down of caste ideologies, especially with regard to discrimination between members of higher and lower castes, has led the dhobi youth to dress ostensibly and well. That they are able to dress like members of the upper castes is a reflection on both the attitude of present day society as well as the wave of westernization that has brought with it taste for western style clothing, cosmetics, foreign liquors and cigarettes which has pervaded all strata of society.

Traditionally, the men wore a 'dhoti' and 'kurta' (a long cloth wrapped around the middle of the body and a long loose fitting collarless shirt on top) and the women wore a 'lahnga' and 'choli' (a skirt and blouse) with a 'dupatta'. Now-a-days, only the old men continue to wear the dhoti and kurta while the younger men have all switched to wearing either pyjamas and shirts or the western style trousers and shirt. The women have all switched to wearing sarrees like the upper caste Hindu women, except that they wear it old fashioned, with the pallav draped in front and the head covered rather than in the way it is worn by elite Indian women with the pallav trailing at the back. Young unmarried girls do not wear sarrees but 'salwar-kameez' and very young girls may wear frocks.

The actual number of clothes possessed by an individual rarely go beyond one or two changes, but variety is attained by wearing the clothes of the clients that come to be washed. Out of 52 households interviewed regarding their expenses on clothes, 22

replied that they wore the clothes that were either gifted by their clients or those that came for washing. Buying clothes is rarely on the monthly or even bi or tri monthly budget of a household. In fact in most households, clothes were made only for boys who are studying or doing jobs and even these were made once or twice a year or even once in two years. New clothes are generally stitched on occasions such as wedding of a close kin or may come as a gift on certain occasions such as the marriage or the birth of a child or grandchild.

The dhobis take good advantage of the clothes of the clients that have come to be washed. The desire for new and varied garments is, to a large extent, satisfied by wearing for a few times any garment of a client that catches their fancy and fits them well. For daily use, the borrowing of expensive clothes is avoided, since there is danger of their getting damaged but for a special occasion, an expensive saree or shirt and trousers may be borrowed without any qualms of conscience. This borrowing of clothes (without the knowledge of the client) is considered one of the privileges of being a dhobi and the clients are also aware of it, but quite helpless in the matter. Widely prevalent proverbs such as "the king's headgear is the dhobi's loin cloth" show that this is a matter that is widely known and accepted.

On the whole, clothes form a very insignificant part of any household's budget. Those in non-traditional occupations mostly save money from their individual earnings to buy clothes—or their parents use the money that they give them as part of their salaries or earnings, to get them clothes. The money earned from the household occupation of washing clothes is rarely used for the purpose of buying clothes.

### **Accommodation**

Most dhobis live in rented houses that are old and were taken on rent a long time back. In construction and space, they offer extremely poor living conditions. The normal rent paid by those who live within the walled city is Rs. 10/- or Rs. 11/- a month for a ground floor and Rs. 5/- or Rs. 6/- a month for a first floor. Most dhobis admitted that they had not paid even this meagre rent for years together. Those who live near the ghats in Minto Road or in servants quarters in the Railway colonies

have free accommodation. The economy in rent is compensated by the congested and dirty living space. To move into better accommodation, they would have to pay at least twenty times more rent than what most of them are paying and such expenditure would be way beyond the budget-strings of any of them. To get proper living space is an impossible goal for them but even to get the minimal of accommodation, which would mean only a roof over the head, is wishful thinking for most of them.

Dhobi households living in Matia Mahal complained about leaks in their ceilings which flood their rooms during the rains and spoil all washed clothes that lie piled inside. The landlord deliberately refuses to repair the houses because he gets only a minimum of rent from these people and he would like them to vacate so that he can relet the house on higher rent at current market rates. So the dhobis have no option but to continue to live in buildings that are nearly coming down on their heads. Several households have been displaced because the house they had originally been living in had collapsed due to age and lack of maintenance.

A household living in a tent at Minto Road has been living like that for the past 12-13 years, ever since the roof of the house in which they used to live in Chawri Bazar collapsed. According to one person who now lives in a temporary structure in Minto Road—"In childhood we used to live in Chawri Bazar in the house of a baniya. There were 8-10 households of dhobis living in that building. The baniya wanted us to vacate the house so that he could build a new building. The walls of the house collapsed, injuring several persons, after which we all vacated it and all the households dispersed to various places. My father came to Barakhamba Road to the servant's quarter of a colonel's bungalow, whose clothes he then washed free of charge. Then he started keeping ill health and could not work, so we left the place and came to Mangolpuri where we built huts to live in. Once a fire broke out in the hutments and the clothes of 20-25 dhobis got damaged. The councillor elected to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi from that area told us that he will get 'ghats' made for us at Minto Road, and that we should shift from there. From that time onwards we are living here."

The inability of the dhobis to pay high rents and the fact that



none of them possesses any house gives them a feeling of insecurity with respect to living quarters. For them the accommodation that they have now is the best that they could have under the circumstances and to be displaced from here would mean the roadside. Apprehension is constantly harboured as to whether their buildings are going to be pulled down or not ? A fear often verbalized by them.

### **Education**

In the government owned institutions, education is free up to the primary stage. In addition, children of scheduled castes get small monthly stipends, free books and exercise-books and in some institutions even free meals. Free uniforms may be given in schools which have special uniforms. However, some dhobis have put their children in private institutions which charge fees for education. Even in government owned schools, a nominal fee is charged after the primary level—moreover exercise books, books etc. have to be bought. Education becomes most expensive when a boy joins college—for in addition to fees, from which he may be exempted, pocket money, good clothes and bus fare cost the parents some amount of money. Small children are generally sent to neighbourhood schools, to which they walk. Colleges are however, farther away and can be reached only on transport. Only one or two households employ private tutors for their children.

Out of the fifty three households interviewed for this purpose, twenty six recorded no expenses on education. This was either because they had no child studying in school or that the children were in primary school and thus exempted from fees ; and they were also getting free books and stationery. In some cases they were also getting Rs. 2/- or Rs. 5/- per month as stipend.

Others recorded small expenses of rupees 10-12/- per child per month on books and exercise books and in some cases small fees ranging between 40 paise and Rs. 2/- a month. Some dhobis remarked that they buy their children books and copies only when they have money for it. A number of them pick up discarded books, copies and pencils, pens etc. from their clients. Books can also be borrowed from friends and libraries. This borrowing is especially necessary for those who are studying in

higher grades and in colleges, for books for them become more and more expensive.

In one household consisting of parents and two sons, one is studying in 3rd class in a private school and the other in the nursery—the expense on education was Rs. 100/- a month including tutions. In another household the expenses for a college going son was Rs. 100/- a month ; in another, a boy studying in the tenth class spends whatever money he earns by washing the uniforms of a canteen, amounting to about Rs. 250-300/- a month, on his own education, clothes and pocket expenses. Such high expenses on education are exceptional and though college going boys may be given comparatively liberal pocket expenses they cut down expenditures on education by getting their fees exempted, obtaining stipends from the government and borrowing books. Most dhobi college going boys expressed feeling a kind of inferiority in comparison to other students in college who can afford to go to the canteen several times a day, wear good clothes, see movies and generally spend lavish amounts as pocket money. These feelings of inferiority kept most of them away from moving around with other students. Some households who can afford it do indulge their sons with fairly large amounts of pocket money. One boy who is a graduate and who was unemployed at the time the questionnaire was filled, replied that he used to get Rs. 55/- per year as scholarship while he was studying in college, in addition he used to get Rs. 5/- per day as expenses from his parents. At the moment, after completing his studies he was getting less, but at that time his parents were proud of him since he always passed his examinations but now since he has not got a job they are dejected and do not give him much money.

Education is not on the priority list of expenditures in most households. There are two reasons for it. Firstly, few households have sufficient money left after satisfying needs of food and work inputs for education ; secondly, education, at least up to school level, can be obtained without much expenditure.

Dhobi children are handicapped by the inability of their parents to spend on their books and tutions and poverty forces a lot of parents to remove their children from schools and put them into the manual labour force. Those who struggle to put

their children through higher education do so in the hope that the boy will be able to earn a good living. Only a child that shows promise by never failing in school and getting better marks in examinations is allowed to continue with his education. A few parents, anticipating higher returns have put their children into privately run schools of better standards, incurring a much higher expense. In such a school, a child is expected to get better education, learn good manners and grow up more like a child belonging to the better socio-economic levels of society. This would give him an additional advantage in life, compared to a child who has gone to a 'poor' school. This happened only in those households where at least one brother or son has successfully made good in life through education and it is largely through the initiative of this person that younger members of the household are encouraged to get better education.

### **Domestic fuel, Electricity and Water**

Food is cooked on 'chullahs' or hearths lit by the spent coal from the 'bhatti' or the iron. The greatest possible economy is practised in this respect and wood may be collected from the trees nearby the Jamuna ghat to serve as fuel. Only under conditions of extreme emergency is fresh coke burnt in the 'chullah'. Though many houses have kerosene burning stoves, these are sparingly used to economise on kerosene oil. No household buys more than 10 litres of oil in a month and in most households only 5 litres are bought and the stove is lit only when there is some special hurry to prepare something.

Most households have electricity—out of our sample only 4 houses do not have electricity connections. One of them expressed inability to get a connection because of lack of funds. The houses being small there are not more than two or three bulbs in each house, in addition there may be one or two ceiling fans. Since most often there are several households living under the same roof, the electricity expenses are shared. Even for the small amount that each household has to give out, like Rs. 20-30/- every two or three months, they experience difficulty in saving and putting aside the money. Efforts are made to economise on electricity that is not absolutely necessary, like running of electric fans. Even in hot summer the fans are not run by women while

they iron clothes because there is danger of the iron cooling down very fast and also it is felt that a person would fall sick by sitting under the cool fan and using a hot iron because of the mixture of hot and cold airs.

High electricity bills are run only by those households which use electric irons but in their case the expenditure on electricity is balanced by the reduction on expenditure on coal.

Water is essential for a dhobi to carry on his trade. But water becomes a consumption item in terms of expenditure only when water is drawn from taps getting water from the municipal water supply. For example, 12 households recorded no expense on water, either because they use well water or wash clothes at the River Jamuna. The few buckets of water needed for domestic use may be drawn from the neighbourhood municipal taps. Like electricity, water expenses are also shared by the several households living under the same roof.

### Medicine

The Dhobis tend to curtail medical expenses as far as possible. Heavy expenditure on medical treatment is incurred only when it becomes a question of life and death. For ordinary sickness, either they visit the free government dispensaries or cheap (quacks) 'doctors'. Due to the lack of savings and tendency to spend money as it comes, selling of household goods or borrowing of money often becomes necessary at the time of a grave illness. One informant whose son died at the age of 9 had taken Rs. 6000/- as advance from his clients for the expenses at the time of sickness of his child. Parents of a boy who died at the age of 17 said that they had to spend all their savings on his illness. Another person whose younger brother had a tonsillitis operation done claimed he had spent Rs. 700/- on the operation. Another person sold 200 sq. yards of land that he possessed for Rs. 3000/- in order to treat his daughter and mother who were simultaneously ill and both of whom later died.

At each sickness most households have to borrow money unless some lottery opens in their name at that time. For the fact that proper treatment is resorted to only when a person appears seriously ill, and lack of knowledge about the nature of illness which prevents them from assessing the seriousness of any

ailment from its earlier symptoms, give rise to a high number of persons succumbing to illness.

The case of a three month old child of an informant would serve to illustrate the point. The child was running fever from the morning and its mother, who had to attend the wedding of her H Zy took him to the wedding in the evening thinking that there was nothing to worry. In the heat and the crowd of the marriage celebrations, the condition of the baby deteriorated and it was brought home at night, but was not given any treatment during the night. By 11 a.m. the next day the condition of the baby was overtly serious and it was taken to the local chemist who referred it to a medical doctor. Then they took it to a local general practitioner who expressed his helplessness to do anything. Then it was taken to a better known medical practitioner who asked them to immediately hospitalise the baby. By the time they took the baby to the hospital it had collapsed and could not be revived even after it was put on drip.

Even after the baby expired the parents were highly confused as to the reason for its sickness and consequent death and it was left as a matter of fate.

As a general rule able-bodied and young persons, especially a man's young wife, are given the best of medical care while the old and the very young are treated with comparative neglect. One woman about 30 years of age who suffers from tuberculosis replied that her medical expense comes to about Rs. 50/- a month, another woman of young age stated that she had recently spent Rs. 50/- on X-ray because she has tuberculosis, a common ailment among the dhobis.

The substantial economic contribution that a woman makes to her household makes the day-to-day running of the household work extremely difficult if she does not keep good health. If a man or woman dies in the prime of life, it leaves the household an incomplete unit and replacement becomes necessary. The death of a child or an old person is deeply mourned but the household continues without much hindrance. An old person does not economically contribute to a household and the circumstances where proper medical care is a severe strain on the household economy, the treatment of the old and very young are not high on the priority list of expenditure. Slow and debilitat-

ing maladies like chronic cough or backaches or slow fever in old age are left untreated and allowed to take their toll.

### Other expenditures

Apart from the above mentioned, there are few avenues of expenditure in a dhobi household. Toilet soap is used only by a few individuals, most of them use the small cakes of soap left after the washing of clothes, for bathing. Oil etc. may be bought occasionally whenever there are a few paise to spare. Similarly, some of the young wives like to spend on cosmetics and artificial jewellery which might average to Rs. 10-15/- a month. A few educated persons subscribe to daily newspapers and one or two even to popular magazines. In one household, where the husband is a milk vendor and the wife irons clothes, Rs. 80/- a month is spent on getting their clothes washed from their FZS.

Expenditure on entertainment is not fixed and varies from time to time and is largely a situational decision. Entertainment involves mainly movie going, women might go to see a movie to mark a festive occasion like a wedding in the household or a religious festival like Holi or Diwali. Men go to see movies more often and they retain part of the money that they earn for such expenses. Boys working in jobs work overtime without disclosing it to their parents or they may conceal their actual salary in some instances. Surplus money thus retained with them is spent on entertainment—smoking and drinking and moving around with their friends. Some men, mostly of the older age group, also gamble.

### Conspicuous consumption

Ceremonies marking the various rite-de-passage in a person's life and all religious festivals are occasions for high consumption.

### Birth

The birth of the first child whether boy or girl is an occasion for celebration. Previously, all the relatives and women of the neighbourhood used to collect together and play the drum, sing songs and be served with liquor and betel leaves. There would be communal feasting. Now-a-days rising prices have reduced the scale of celebrations to the family, married daughters

and their affinal households. A special preparation of sweet with 'gole makhane' is made on this occasion. At the birth of the first son of one of my informants, the person concerned FBeW was in charge of the preparations, other women helping were in relation to the father of the child—his FZ, FZD, FFBW and BeW. The woman had delivered the baby in the hospital and came home after four days—the festivities were being held on the seventh day. The purchases had all been done by the HBeW and consisted of Rs. 130/- worth of dry fruits, some 6-7 kg of pure 'ghee', 10 kg of potatoes and equivalent quantity of cauliflower and tomatoes and onions for curry. For the preparation of the 'churma' which is the special sweet,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  kg of sugar was added in addition to the mixture of dry fruit and 'gole makhane'. This sweet is given to the mother of the newly born child and apart from its consumption by the members of the household, distributed to married daughters of the household and sent to the children in the natal household of the mother. All the married 'daughters' of the household had been invited to a feast at night. Seven bottles of country liquor, then costing Rs. 10/- each, had been bought for the purpose. Overall expense came to between Rs. 500/- and Rs. 600/-. From the natal household of the mother came gifts which are known as 'chochak', these consist of clothes and a few pieces of jewellery for the newborn baby and clothes for its parents, the total expense of such gifts usually does not exceed more than Rs. 600/- or Rs. 700/- for the first child and subsequently becomes less or none at all for other children.

Ceremony on the birth of a child is not compulsory and depends upon the economic condition of the household, its aspirations, prestige within the 'biradari', and the order of birth of the child, the ceremonies being confined mainly to the first born. Out of 50 households interviewed for the expenses they have incurred on the birth of the child last born in the household, twelve households gave no response to the question, because no child had been born within past few years and few dhobis remember or care to recall the expenses made a number of years back like seven or eight years. Twenty-one replied that they had incurred no expense at the birth of their last born child, which included first born and male children. The minimum

and essential expenses is the fees paid to the mid-wife if the child is born at home and is of the order of Rs. 15/- to Rs. 25/-. If the child is borne in a government owned or charitable hospital, the expense comes to nothing apart from conveyance and medicines. Apart from this, there is expenditure in giving special diet to the mother and in feasting the members of the household and in sending gifts to the affinal households of the woman who had been married out of the household in question. Out of the fifteen households who had incurred some expenditure on the birth of a child—six had spent the money only on feeding the mother and had not done any feasting. The special food includes pure ghee and sugar, 'suji' and dry fruits which is made into sweets. The expense on such items falls in the range of Rs. 100 to Rs. 150/-. The others had spent money on feasting and drinking, and the amounts range from a minimum of Rs. 300/- to a maximum of Rs. 1500/-. Those who spend more, spend on inviting more guests to the feast and in giving gifts to married 'daughters'.

### Mundan

When a baby, either boy or girl, is 1½ month old the ceremony of 'mundan' is preformed. A barber is called and the hair on the baby's head is shaven off. For about the last ten years only the members of one's family are invited on this occasion but earlier the entire 'biradari' was invited and feasted. The barber is paid about Rs. 11/- in cash and given a set of clothes and some food.

### Birthday

Some persons now-a-days have started celebrating the birthdays of their children, especially the first birthday. Since it is a newly introduced ceremonial, anyone who does celebrate it, does it in his own style. One such celebration, that of the first birthday of the first child of a college educated graduate dhobi, who at that time was an unemployed young man, was on the lines of a wedding celebration, complete with 'shamiana', electric lights and a loud speaker blowing out pop music. A 'halwai' had been called in to do the cooking and the menu was similar to a wedding feast with fried puries and halua. The gifts that came were display



ed in the manner of a dowry display with a prominent place for the large number of gifts that had come from the child's MF's household. The women were dressed in all their finery and jewellery. The invitees were selected and consisted mainly of kin and affinal relatives of the household. The gifts consisted largely of toys and clothes for the child. The western touch to the celebrations was given by the cutting of the birthday cake, which had two candles on it instead of one, indicating the dhobi way of counting age.

There was lot of drinking by the male members of the household, especially the baby's MF and MBS, but no public drinking like on a wedding. The total expenses came to about Rs. 1000/- and were borne out by the child's FF, FFBe, FFBy. In this household the child's father was educated and several of the boys in the family were going to school. The child's FMZ is married to the owner of a tyre shop who is the richest man in the 'biradari'; the child's FMBSs are also college educated and the family as such claims a respectful position in the 'biradari'. The young members of the household are oriented towards social achievement and the first step towards climbing the social ladder is to gain prestige in the eyes of the 'biradari'. This was done by celebrating with exaggerated pomp and show the occasion of the birthday of a child, which also indicated how 'modern' they were. It was done in spite of the fact that the father of the child concerned was unemployed at that time and there was considerable conflict in the household because his parents wanted him to separate his hearth and start earning on his own.

### **Adoption**

A couple who had no son and had only one daughter adopted a boy. They spent Rs. 10,000/- in feasting the entire 'biradari'. Part of the money was taken as a loan on interest from a baniya and the couple are paying Rs. 150/- per month as interest on the borrowed sum.

This heavy expenditure was deemed necessary for the foster parents to assume complete legal and moral rights over the child and to dissociate him completely from his real parents. In the words of the informant he spent Rs. 10,000/- "called the entire biradar and adopted a boy. Now nobody can tang

them that the child has anything to do with his parents."

### Marriage

Traditionally the major expense at any wedding was on food, the entire 'biradari', including all children had to be fed. The total expenses were high, a very large amount being consumed in drinking liquor. The food served could be simple, only rice and 'daal' and brown sugar and the bride was sent off to her affinal household with only two or three sets of clothes and five utensils. On an average, even now-a-days, the amount of money spent on liquor by both the boy's and the girl's side respectively, is about Rs. 1,500/- to Rs. 2,000/-. The marriage celebrations are stretched over several days and all these days are occasions of drinking and feasting, at least by the members of the households concerned and their 1st order kin. The gifts brought in by a girl are an indication of the relative economic well-being of her natal household and their aspirations to enhance the prestige of their household. An ambitious household will try to spend beyond their means to establish themselves as superior in the 'biradari'. Gift giving at weddings is continuously on the increase and this is in spite of the fact that no demand is made by the boy's side and the bride is treated equally well in her affinal household whether or not she brings in many gifts. Even the boy's side incurs an unreasonably high expenditure at the wedding only as a matter of prestige.

According to one male informant who had been married about the year 1947, "At my wedding, I rode on a bullock during the wedding and wore silver ornaments like a woman. Some two or three hundred persons went in the 'barat' and from the girl's side there was an equal number of people. They had prepared 'laddu' and 'kachori' and on our side we had prepared 'gulab jaman' and 'purie', there was no band, lights or 'shaminna'." At a boy's wedding now-a-days it is a regular feature to hire a richly adorned mare and a western style music band in the style of the Punjabis. Many boys, especially somewhat educated, prefer to wear a suit in the western style rather than the traditional 'kurta' and 'pajama'. The silver ornaments have been replaced by wrist watches, gold finger rings and garlands made of currency notes—the latter are gifts of household members and kin. At one wed

ding the number of such garlands came to around twenty. Their denomination ranging from Rs. 11/- to Rs. 500/- the highest denomination one being given by the MZ of the bride-groom. The value of the gift depends more upon the economic status of the giver rather than the exact relationship to the bridegroom—though most such expensive gifts come from first order kin. The amount of cash thus contributed covers to a large extent the amount spent on the wedding. It is an interesting feature that the scale of the gifts are proportional to the scale at which the wedding is conducted—a fair indicator to the fact that both are proportional to the status of the household concerned.

At a boy's wedding the expenses are largely on food served to guests, on liquor and on gifts of jewellery and clothes made to the bride. At one wedding of a boy, who has passed his matriculation examination and works at a factory manufacturing piston rings, and whose elder brother is a bank clerk and where the household is supposed to be quite prosperous, the total amount that was spent on the wedding was Rs. 12,000/-. Out of this Rs. 3,000/- was the total cost of food served over three days. The rest was spent on clothes for the bride and bridegroom, on decorative display, music band, hiring of the mare etc. One hundred and ten gms of gold were given to the bride out of old household jewellery. From the MB came Rs. 101/- as 'bhat' and clothes for the parents of the bride-groom.

The expenses at a girl's wedding likewise show a steep rise. According to one woman informant about 35 years old who was married some twenty years back, "At my wedding, everything was executed with great pomp and show. The groom had come on a mare accompanied by a music band. My father had prepared rice and 'daal' which was served with brown sugar and ghee. The entire 'biradari' had come to the feast. The next day to the wedding the entire 'biradari' had come to my affinal household and they were feasted with 'laddu' and 'purie' and 'daal'. My father gave me everything in dowry. He gave me silver ornaments, earrings, necklace, bangles, and for my husband, gold earrings and finger rings. There were also some twenty, twenty five utensils of brass. In those days it was not the fashion to give more than this. There was no cots and dressing tables or fine clothes." We can compare this to the gifts brought by

a bride in a wedding held in 1977, (quoted in earlier chapter on Exchange) which included cot, dressing table, several gold ornaments, fine clothes both for bride and bride-groom, table fan, cycle etc.

In the above mentioned wedding, the wedding guests numbered six-seven hundred persons, all of whom were invitees from the girl's side. The boy's side were asked to bring only twenty-five guests. The menu consisted of two vegetable curries, elaborately prepared with a large variety of spices, fried puries and two varieties of sweetmeats. There were also lights for display, elaborate decorations and 'shamiana'. An important difference that can be observed in the weddings of today is in the dress of women. Previously, the dhobi women wore cotton clothes, no matter what the occasion. Now-a-days the young married women wear expensive embroidered nylon sarees and good brocaded Banarasi sarees—they stand out in sharp contrast to the older women who wear their ordinary workday clothes even at weddings—and this includes the mother of the bride or bridegroom. At the time of the actual wedding ceremony the bride is dressed in the traditional coarse yellow cloth and covered from head to toe in a white sheet. A head band is tied from top of the sheet onto which is tied a cardboard with tinsel and six dried-up eucalyptus leaves in the form of a crown which serves as her only decoration. An interesting part is that no jewellery is put on the bride till the marriage ceremony is complete and although some modern girls may like to put on artificial jewellery for the ceremony of 'jaimala' or exchange of garlands, these are taken off for the proper marriage ceremony. The traditional marriage ceremony was simple in terms of dress and expenditures—now-a-days dress and display is becoming more and more lavish—a development influenced largely by the observations of marriages conducted by the upper classes and higher castes of Punjabis, Baniyas and Kshatriyas. At the wedding mentioned above the total expense came to about Rs. 1500/- which is quite a large amount for any ordinary dhobi household. All households do not carry out their ceremonies in such elaborate style. Another girl who had got married around the same time as the one mentioned above, had brought nothing with her except two sets of clothes 250 gms of silver and 1 or 2 'tolas' of gold and

five utensils.

Though no overt discrimination or ill treatment is shown to any girl bringing in any less dowry, the women make certain derogatory remarks about the household of a girl who has not been given much. A bride bringing in lots of gifts, feels proud of her natal household. Comparison about gifts given at different weddings is a common topic of discussion even among the children let alone the women. At one instance one boy made a snide remark about the poor quality of the sofa set received at the marriage of his elder brother. His BWe, whose father had given the gift and in whose presence the remark was made at once retorted angrily that it was the fault of the children of the household who kept jumping on the sofas and not their inferior quality, which was responsible for their dilapidated condition.

Gift giving at weddings at the marriage of near consanguinal or affinal relatives forms an important item of expenditure of any household. The gifts that one gives are publicly given and displayed and known to everyone in the 'biradari' and are a direct reflection on the status of the household both in economic and social terms. Individuals often go to the extent of borrowing money to give gifts to a kin.

One woman, whose two HZD were getting married, had prepared gifts for them. One of the daughters was the first in her household to get married and for her the gifts were more elaborate than for the other. There were ten utensils, clothes for the HZ and HZH and for the HZHF and HZHN and for all the children in the household. For the other girl there were five utensils and clothes for both her and her parents. There was a gold nose ring for each girl—each costing Rs. 400/-. The money spent on all the utensils came to Rs. 520/- and on clothes was Rs. 1,500/-. The total amount spent on all the gifts was Rs. 3,000/-. All this money was borrowed from clients and moneylenders. According to the woman, "you have to do all this for the sake of prestige, if you do not have prestige you have nothing. Even if you go hungry in the stomach you must have prestige in the 'biradari'. Even if you have a house full of fine things, if you do not have prestige in the 'biradari'—all of it will be of no use." It is such sentiments that prompt many dhobis to make lavish gifts at weddings a ceremony which is witnessed by

the largest number of persons and most talked about in the 'biradari'. One woman gave the following list of all the gifts she had made during the course of one year in the wedding of her kin.

- Wedding of Z — sofa set, 5 utensils and 5 sets of clothes (expenditure about Rs. 600-700/-)
- HZ — earrings of half tola of gold and five utensils and to the groom, wrist watch and gold finger ring (expenditure Rs. 1000/-)
- HZZH — clothes of HZ and HZH and their children (expenditure Rs. 400/-)
- HZ (classificatory) dressing table and five utensils (expenditure about Rs. 300/-)

### Death

The ceremonies at death are ritually essential and necessarily performed by everyone. The death of a young person or a child is an occasion of grief and mourning and marked by austerity. It is essential to give food and clothes and utensils to a Brahmin at the death of any adult—but the food served at the death of an old person, especially who has grandchildren, is lavish and there is free flowing liquor, an expenditure which like on other occasions of conspicuous consumption, is tuned to household status. The expenses listed by informants on the death of old persons in the household varied from Rs. 400/- to Rs. 2500/-. The variation in expenditure is reflective of the number of persons invited to the funeral feast and the quality of food served, especially the number of liquor bottles opened. The guests invited at the minimum must include all married daughters of the household and their husbands and at the maximum, and this was customary in the past, the entire 'biradari'. Prestige conscious households can still invite a hundred or hundred and fifty persons. At the death of an old man having six grown up sons and several grandsons—the money spent was about Rs. 2500-3000/- out of which Rs. 1250/- was spent on liquor and the number of guests invited was two hundred and fifty. The Pandit was called and fed on the tenth day and given five utensils and five sets of clothes. The two daughters of the deceased were also called and served 'kheer'.

'purie' and a vegetarian meal.

### Festivals

The celebrations and expenditures at religious festivals and rituals are on a far more subdued scale than those connected with the life cycle of an individual. The prime reason for this is that such occasions are for household celebrations and do not involve participants by the 'biradari'. Only if it is the first festivals that a woman is celebrating in her affinal household, then the natal household of a girl incurs a heavy expenditure in the form of gifts and feasting the newly weds.

An important festival of the dhobis is Holi—it is an occasion of merry making, feasting and drinking—throwing of colour and water. Sons-in-law, and married daughters are invited to play Holi and feasted and given cash gifts. If it is the first festival after marriage of a daughter, the arrangements are lavish and the cash gifts may be of high denomination like Rs. 101/- or Rs. 51/- otherwise it is only of the order of Rs. 5/- or 10/-. The ritual celebrations for Holi involve the lighting of the ritual fire and burning of Holika. A special sweet meat called 'gujiya' of wheat flour and 'suji' is prepared and some of it is sent to the households of married daughters. The total expenditure at Holi—most of which is on food preparation and liquor comes to about Rs. 100/- or 150/-. In case a newly married daughter is to be given gifts the expenses come to about Rs. 200/-, 300/- or more, depending upon the individual household. Performing 'puja' on this occasion is a must in every household for this is the festival that is traditionally associated with Shudra Varna.

Dussehra is another important festival, signifying the destruction of Ravana by Rama. This is an occasion for the performance of ritual 'puja' in the household, coinciding with the burning of an effigy of Ravana. Fried 'puries' and 'halva' is prepared and 'puries' in the names of the all male members of the household and their spouses are placed at the place of performance of the puja and later eaten. This occasion does not involve any expenditure apart from food preparation. No gifts are given.

Diwali is celebrated with lights and crackers. Sweets are prepared at home and sent to the households of married daughters—

a newly married daughter is usually gifted with a 'saree' along with expensive sweetmeats and fruits bought from the market—the total cost of the gifts may be quite high—of the order of Rs. 600-700/- though usually it is less. The expenditures on crackers and lights are optional and depend on how much money the children have collected from their elders.

Bhaiya-Dooj is an important occasion which signifies the love between brother and sister, a festival that appeals greatly to the dhobis who recognize the brother-sister bond as the most affective of all kin relationships. Young married women dress up in all their finery, to visit their brothers in their natal households and put the 'tikka' on their foreheads. The brother promises to protect his sister on all occasions and presents her with a small gift of Rs. 5/- or Rs. 10/-. As on all other occasions, if a sister is newly married, she is presented with expensive gifts—a saree and fruits and sweets.

The most important festival for married women is Karba chauth, celebrated on the fourth day of the waning moon in the month of 'Kartik' (October). All married women on this day keep a fast and in the evenings dress up in all their fine clothes and jewellery and pray for the long life and well being of their husbands. Food is taken only after the reflection of the moon can be seen in the water placed in the 'karba' which is a vessel made of brass. On the first karba chauth a girl celebrates in her husband's house, her natal household sends the gift of a brass 'karba' (cost about Rs. 150/- to Rs. 200/-) and baskets full of vegetables and fruits, and sweets. On later such occasions she is given a baked earthen 'karba' along with small gifts of fruits and vegetables and sweets.

The gifts that are sent to a woman on the first year after her wedding are commensurate with the scale at which the wedding was conducted. A lavishly conducted wedding is usually followed up with the lavish gifts.

The pattern of consumption is indicative of several significant aspects of the dhobi way of life and of the changing pattern of living and style of life. Firstly we find with regard to items of daily consumption, the emphasis is largely on items of the display and personal adornment rather than for real comfort and use. In this regard we find that even changing patterns of consump-



tion indicate only an emulative quality rather than any basic change in the pattern of wants. The desire is to keep up with the Joneses rather than bring about a real improvement in one's standard of living.

The basic ideas regarding work and way of life remain unchanged. The changes are largely involving items of display value rather than use value. Thus, while a lot of persons go in for sofa sets, tables, chairs, vases, show cases, pictures etc. nobody has shown any desire to possess modern facilities for the kitchen. Though the dress and appearance of women using lipstick and nail enamel has changed from that of their grandmothers—they still cook on 'chullahs' burning soft coke, using traditional methods of cooking.

The kerosene stove is a rare thing in any household and even if it is there, it may not be used due to lack of money to buy kerosene oil. The cooking gas is unknown and so are modern kitchen items like pressure cookers, hot plates etc. Though many houses possess television sets very few households possess a refrigerator which in any case is often used for just chilling water during summers.

TABLE 21  
GOODS POSSESSED BY THE DHOBI HOUSEHOLDS  
Total No. of households—102

Name of item	No. of house- holds who possess them	Source of obtaining these goods				
		Inherited	Received in Dowry	Bought of own money Out of From savings client's shop (paid by washing clothes)	Any other	
Cots (proper wood ones)	9	2	4	3	—	—
String cots	38	20	—	18	—	—
Chairs and Tables	9	2	—	7	—	—

Steel Almirahs	7	1	4	2	—	—
Sofa set	8	—	6	2	—	—
Dressing Tables	4	—	3	1	—	—
Sewing Machines	6	—	1	4	—	Received from Gov. for 'gett- ing tubectomy done.
Electric fan (ceiling)	57	15	1	28	13	—
Electric fan (Table)	15	2	6	7	—	—
Television	6	—	—	5	—	Loan received from office
Clock	30	4	20	6	—	—
Time piece	10	2	5	3	—	—
Watches	48	2	20	26	—	—
Kerosene stove	48	—	1	47	—	—
Cycle	65	20	10	30	5	—
Radio/Transi- sistors	70	8	10	40	11	Sold bullock and bought radio
Tape Recorders	1	—	—	1	—	—
Cooler	1	—	—	1	—	—

A very high value is placed on good clothes and items of personal adornment like watches and rings. Some of the younger generation, especially the educated ones, would like to live in better house, under better sanitary conditions but most dhobis are yet unaware of the importance of clean and comfortable living and actual raising of living in terms of better food

TABLE 22

WHAT IS THE HOUSEHOLD GOOD YOU WOULD LIKE TO  
POSSESS NEXT ?

Name of good	Motor cycle	Tele- vision	Refri- gerator	Elec- tric Fan	Almi- rah sofa set etc.	Uten- sils	Own house	Do not want any thing
No. of respondents	1	12	4	6	6	2	3	60

N.R. = 9.

Do not want anything because a) No money — 20  
b) No space — 10  
c) No desire — 30

*Note :* The very large number\* of respondents who reply in the negative when asked about their plans for buying anything is a possible indicator of the disinclination of the dhobi to plan for the future. This tendency of the dhobi to live in a day-to-day fashion has been discussed elsewhere in the dissertation also (see chapter—The Actor).

in nutritional terms, better house, proper sanitary facilities, for cooking and household work. These items do not come into the aspiration map of most individuals.

All in all, there is an almost conscious avoidance of any thing that might change the traditional way of life to which the dhobis cling stubbornly. No household for example is willing to alter the traditional working pattern of women and any such items that might do so, like electric irons, stoves, liquified petroleum gas burners, pressure cookers etc. are avoided. The cooking on soft coke 'chullahs' and the use of irons fed with soft coke keeps a traditional balance in consumption of soft coke where used, soft coke from the 'iron' is put into the 'chullah'.

While great parsimony is practised regarding items of individual consumption such as food, clothes, toilet articles, comparatively extravagant expenditure takes place at occasions involving 'biradari' participation such as marriage, birth, death etc. As already mentioned expenditure on such occasions is related both to an individual's own position within the biradari as well to



## THE CHANGING OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN

The dhobis identify themselves with the occupation of washing clothes, their hereditary profession. However, under the impact of the forces of change, the dhobis are changing both towards new occupations as well as towards diversifying their traditional mode of occupation. In order to understand the changes that are occurring in the dhobi occupational structure, we must first delineate the various forces and factors of change that have contributed towards diversifications in the traditional system.

### Forces and Factors of Change

The city of Delhi of which the dhobis are residents has been undergoing a historical process of change over all the years since its foundation in the year 1648 by Emperor Shahjehan. The changes that interest us at the present moment can best be identified from the time of the Partition of India in 1947 and the consequent Independence of India.

The partition resulted in large scale migration of population from India into Pakistan and vice-versa, accompanied by widespread riots and bloodshed. The riots led to considerable re-arrangement of habitation pattern of the city. Those dhobis who

had been living in close quarters with the Muslims felt insecure and moved into new localities, some of them lying outside the walled city. Large number of Muslims forming a large portion of the population of Delhi migrated to Pakistan and from Pakistan came Punjabi refugees.

The Punjabis brought with them a culture alien to the Delhi culture; they also came with pressing economic needs as refugees. Along with destitution and hunger they also brought the Punjabi ethos of hard work and entrepreneurship. For instance whereas the Kshatriyas, Baniyas, Kayasthas, Brahmins and Muslims inhabiting Delhi would never have thought of washing their own clothes, the Punjabi women not only washed their own clothes at home but some of them even went from house to house washing clothes of other households for cash payment. What is initiated by the Punjabis as a result of their economic needs, gradually seemed to provide a new attitude towards work. The women of other castes picked up the idea of washing clothes at home, a change that was also bolstered by the rise in cost of living which accompanied the general changes in the economic environment after World War II.

Urbanisation (Smelsor, 1967, p. 30), accompanying processes of industrialisation and economic expansion, led to the phenomenal growth of the city of Delhi, both in terms of area and of population. A number of peripheral industrial towns also sprang up. A large number of people from rural areas migrated to the city in search of work. These included many who were dhobis by caste and occupation and others like the Punjabis, who, in search of a living were ready to wash clothes in the houses for cash payments. Amongst these were migrants from Haryana and Rajasthan.

The emergence of a new Independent and Democratic India had several repercussions on the socio-economic scene. Not only was there a growth of industries and expansion of economic horizons but also the ushering in of a new value system and ideology. The Indian government adopted as its major goals, the abolition of untouchability, spreading of education to the masses and all in all the building of a socialist caste-free society. Formal education, which during the British Raj was limited to only certain sections of the population, was made available to

everyone by the opening of a large number of schools, both public and privately owned. Primary education was made compulsory for both boys and girls, and the government owned institutions imparted free or near free education, charging only a nominal fee.

A large number of tribes and caste groups, who formed the earlier oppressed sections of society, the ex-untouchables and low castes were listed in government schedules and granted special privileges in Government enterprise, like free education, scholarships and job-reservations. This was done in order to reduce the social and economic differences between different sections of the society. The dhobis were included in the schedule of such castes.

The new value system envisaged an achievement oriented, rather than ascription based society. Occupational barriers were broken and the system offered considerable scope for individual mobility. It was no longer necessary for a person to remain confined within the barriers of his hereditary caste based occupation. He could, by making use of the new resources like education and knowledge, made available to him in the new set up, improve or diversify his lot.

Individual mobility was also aided by the new structure of economic opportunities which presented themselves as India entered into the fervour of modernization (Smelsor, 1967, p. 30) sweeping across the world. The Indian government began to plan for progress and modernization. Consequently, five year plans were formulated. The first of these covered the period 1952—1957. "On the eve of the first Five Year Plan, India was self-sufficient in a number of engineering and electrical products...Established industries such as cotton textiles, paper, cement, sugar, coal and steel continued to increase their installed capacities. In 1950, India ranked first among exporters of cotton textiles" (Aggarwal, V.K., 1975, p. 91).

India also established during this time its shipbuilding, nuclear, satellite, communication, automobile and aeronautical industries turning out native cars, scooters, supersonic aircrafts and ships for commerce and war, amongst other things. India boasts today the third largest technical and scientific manpower in the world.

The market was being flooded with an increasingly large

number of goods. During the nineteen sixties, synthetic fibres like terylene, nylon etc. were introduced. The number of consumer items, watches, transistors, variety of clothes, cosmetics, radios and televisions increased. This was reflected significantly in the rapid increase of retail and shopping centres in Delhi. While New Delhi expanded in terms of introducing fancy, retail shopping centres, Old Delhi became the centre for wholesale trade and small scale industries like paper cutting and card making. There was almost total commercialization of the area. In general, all this meant a significant difference in the quality of life for residents of Delhi. Life became much faster, more complex and impersonalized economic networks replaced personalized social relationships. People faced with a very large number of goods were also imbued with the desire to possess them. None were satisfied with the simpler food and clothing they were used to just thirty years back. Houses became more and more decorative, furniture increased, wardrobes became costlier and varied, not to less importance was increase in entertainment avenues such as films. Delhi, in 1966, was also the first in India to start a television network although it was and still is in black and white.

The dhobis did not remain totally unaffected by all these changes going on around them. The population exchange of 1947 meant loss of considerable Muslim clientele for the dhobis and this loss was but imperfectly balanced by the migrant Punjabi population who had comparatively less need for the services of the dhobis. The growth of the city of Delhi and rising population figures do indicate an overall growth of clientele but the dhobis also began facing competition from migrant dhobis and those who had taken up the job of washing clothes as a recent economic enterprise, like the Punjabi and Rajasthani women, apart from the overall increase in their own populations.

The dhobi trade in the traditional 'jajmani' form suffered a setback because of the acceptance of the idea of washing one's own clothes at home. The new secular ideology that gradually strengthened its stronghold undermining traditional ideas about caste ranking and concepts of purity and pollution also played its part. In the traditional 'jajmani' system the untouchable or ritually impure service castes not only performed services for



their 'jajmans' but also absorbed pollution from them, the task of a service caste was "... absorb the onus or ritual contamination associated with the tasks they perform and facilitate the ritual purity and consequent moral apotheosis of the (high castes)" (Gould, 1958, p. 431).

The dhobi was necessary for some ritually purifying occasions like the bathing of a mother and child after child birth or the ritual bath taken by members of a household when a death occurred in it. The weakening of purity and pollution concepts in the city led to a dispensability of the ritually purifying task of the dhobi and his work remained only that of washing clothes in which he was replaceable by any other individual—a hired servant or a laundry shop.

Introduction of synthetic fibres also meant that less clothes went from each household to the dhobi. These synthetic materials were easily washed at home and needed little ironing, neither did they lose their crease as readily as cotton clothes. The busy life of an urbanized city meant that people were short pressed for time. Some people could no longer wait for the clothes to come back from the dhobi after a period of seven days. Clothes had to be got ready overnight; this required washing or ironing at home. Thus the need of a dhobi to be attached to every household in a 'jajmani' relationship was much reduced. Even where such relationships continued, the work that a dhobi got from any household was much less than what he had got earlier.

However, the changes that led to a dwindling of the traditional form of dhobis work also threw up a new structure of opportunities and made available new resources for diversification and change. The dhobis were faced with a choice of either getting into new occupations or to make fresh use of their traditional skills in new kinds of jobs that were being offered in the changed set up. In the next section we describe the occupations both old and new that are being pursued by the dhobis today.

### **Occupations—old and new**

The dhobi's occupation, as we have already discussed, is not only a mode of getting a living but it is inextricably tied up with a way of life and a form of social organization that we have

described as the 'biradari'. The enculturation of an individual into the dhobi way of life, into the traditional skills, makes it difficult for a sudden switchover to a new occupation.

The difficulties faced by the dhobis to continue in the traditional jajmani mode of work relationship is however compensated by the new demands for his skills in the expanding economic set up that surrounds him. The mushrooming of hotels, hospitals, banks and business houses around provide expansion of a new type of clientele for them. The hospitals and banks need to have their linen and uniforms washed. The hotels, apart from having their own furnishings and linens, also have a stream of guests who also need to get their clothes laundered. The dhobis are either employed by such institutions on wages or paid per piece. The dhobi may even be called to fill tenders for the contract. The money earned from these sources is good, for a hospital or hotel can provide a much larger quantity of linen than any individual household. In fact clientele of only one such institution is sufficient to provide a dhobi with his living, whereas clientele of single household can never pay as well. The hotels also provide a form of work in what is called 'urgent' washing, where the client is given his clothes back in a short period of time, mostly overnight, and the rates are three times or even four times over the usual rates.

Another lucrative source of income is the export houses which have come up in considerable numbers in the recent past, as a result of the big spurt in the cotton garments export business. Here the work involves mainly ironing of tailored garments. The returns are very good because the input required is very little, only coal, and the rates can be pushed up according to the urgency of the exporter to get his work done.

Other kinds of business house that need the services of a dhobi are those that hire out 'shamianas' and linen for wedding and music bands. The income in these is seasonal, fluctuating according to the frequency of weddings in a particular span of time. A person working for such a business house earns six months a year and practically lives off his earnings for the other six months. Their attraction lies in the comparatively large income they provide during the peak season.

All these kinds of work are in high demand amongst the

dhobis for the good income they provide. There is stiff competition amongst them to get them. Those households who have managed to bag such jobs are looked upon as the 'lucky' ones and considered among the richer sections of the sub-caste.

Another kind of modernization of the dhobi work involves the truncating of his job to only ironing. For the dhobis, the advantage is that requires less input, both in terms of material as also time and energy and the returns are good. All over Delhi, one can see dhobis with their ironing tables set up under a tree or under some kind of shelter, ironing clothes from neighbouring houses. For the modern house wife, this provides a lightening of her work. Clothes, washed at home are given across the road to the dhobi, who professionally irons them for rates ranging between 10 paise to 50 paise and most important gives the clothes back within an hour or two.

For individual dhobi households the transition from washing to ironing is a gradual process. In most cases it is the wife, who first sets up a ironing stall, starting with a few clients but as the clients for ironing increase they reduce the washing load. A large part of it is automatically reduced through loss of demand. In some cases the transition is forced through the absence or disability of adult males to carry on traditional work by death, old age, or relinquishing of dhobi trade. Earlier when the demand was for the washing of clothes, rather than for simple ironing, a woman fell upon difficult times if she did not have an adult male, either husband or son, to wash clothes for her to iron. Now-a-days a woman, through the ironing of clothes, can become economically independent if so required.

Commercialisation of the walled city, as already mentioned, has led to many small scale industries notably paper cutting and card making. Certain sections of the city specialise in certain kinds of enterprise, like one area will have flourishing cloth wholesaling and retailing market and another will have all motor repair and spare parts shops. These places require a large number of non-skilled to skilled workers—in the form of paper cutters, or salesmen or motor mechanics.

Now, the dhobi 'katras' in Old Delhi are many a time situated near one or the other of these Business centres. From our sample we find that large number of boys and children from

among the dhobis are employed in such jobs, those who are engaged in paper cutting and book binding are mostly those who live in 'katras' in the vicinity of the large wholesale paper market in Chawri Bazar and Sita Ram Bazar in the walled city. Those employed as motor mechanics live near the centre for motor repairs and spare parts shop at Hamilton Road.

These places provide an additional source of income for the dhobis. Taking advantage of new economic propositions presented before them they exploit them to supplement or replace their income from traditional occupations. As already mentioned it is mostly the male children or the young boys who are so engaged. They are employed at such places either on daily wages or as in the case of motor repair shops, on small stipends as assistants. These children are not greatly needed for the domestic occupation and may be school dropouts. Some are not sent to school at all by parents in order that their labour adds to the family coffers. A number of these children leave this work and turn to traditional work when they are old enough. Some, who are not pulled into traditional work, either because their parents do not have sufficient work or there are elder brothers at home to do the work, leave this kind of job to move into some other employment as they grow up. Few of them continue to obtain regular and permanent employment in card cutting or file making or as motor mechanics or salesmen.

This tendency of some members of the household to turn to other forms of employment, while the household as a whole remains in traditional occupation, gives a new economic viability to the dhobis.

Though individual diversity of occupation exists, the households as a whole do not totally give up the traditional occupation. Out of the 102 households interviewed, in only three households no traditional work in any form was being done. In one nuclear household, the husband is a peon disabled by physical injury from doing traditional work. In one large joint household the male members are all engaged in a lucrative automobile tyre business and in a third, also nuclear, the husband has a drycleaning shop. In most households where the husband is in non-traditional occupation, the women continue to iron clothes. In fact the demand for the ironing of clothes as a separate enter-

prise from washing is quite compatible with the situation where the man takes on a non-traditional work and the woman carries on traditional work in the form of ironing.

Along with the traditional work, some dhobis take up part time work like wrestling and 'jagaran' singing. Wrestling was a recognised hobby in the traditional set up and has a status placement higher on the social scale than a dhobi. Though wrestling itself is not really an occupation, most wrestlers make an income out of bone setting and massaging jobs.

More important than the additional income derived from such activities like wrestling and 'jagaran' singing, is the increased status and expansion of interactional circle that such occupations bring about. These jobs do not form a replacement for dhobi occupations, since they are pursued only as part time occupations, along with the perusal of the traditional occupations. But they serve to give the individual a certain degree of mobility upwards and outwards from his traditional social placement.

One 61 year old man is a singer who sings at 'jagarans' (all night singing in praise of a deity), which are organized by rich people. He has an organised troupe consisting of six individuals, out of which two are Khatiks (a low cast of similar ranking, as dhobi) and one Muslim and rest dhobis. Though all persons in his troupe are low castes and poor yet his sense of importance lies in being invited to the houses of the rich and influential. He is treated with respect within the 'biradari' and he calls himself a 'choudhary'. His clientele is among the rich 'baniya' business men who also call him for 'jagaran' singing.

Similarly, the pehelwans (wrestlers), of which there are several among the dhobis also derive enhancement of prestige from their secondary occupation. One pehelwan has many non-dhobi friends at the place where he goes for wrestling. With them he goes to many places for wrestling competitions. He is also called into various households and even goes to places outside of Delhi for attending to such patients, as need his expertise as a bone setter and masseur. He has a wide friendship circle and acquaintances and consequently he holds views quite different from his castemen in spite of being illiterate.

These are the people who are on the border line of traditional and non-traditional occupations, having a foot in each. However,

there are a few who have gone over totally to non-traditional occupations.

In most cases such a switchover is possible only if certain initial impetus is given to an individual early in life. It may be in the form of education or training in some specialized field like motor mechanics, or paper cutting. Conversely, the change may occur in the absence of any training or initiation into the traditional mode of occupation in such circumstances as when an individual is forced to look for alternate sources of employment.

Since training or impetus for diversification of occupation, either in form of apprenticeship or in form of education, is generally imparted in childhood, few adults take to occupational diversification at a late stage in life. Only in cases of exceptional entrepreneurial ability, have individuals, untrained and uneducated, taken to business or trade, after having spent their early life in the traditional occupation.

Mostly, an individual's vocation in life is at least partly determined by the decisions his elders take in his childhood.

One of the major avenues towards non-traditional occupations is education—a resource, the acquisition of which opens the way for many lucrative possibilities. The government having taken up large scale responsibility for the propagation of education, primary education is not only compulsory for all children of school going age but is also imparted free of cost in all government owned institutions. For scheduled caste children such as of the dhobis, some stipends are also provided. Whether or not such opportunities are availed of, depends to some extent on a process of decision making by parents who weigh the pros and cons of various factors before educating their children. Out of the 102 households interviewed, the following figures were obtained in answer to the questions on whether they put their children to school? How many? Whether boys or girls? or

TABLE 23

<i>Put all children</i>	<i>Put only boys</i>	<i>Some boys and some girls</i>	<i>Not put at all</i>	<i>Do not have any child of school going age</i>	<i>N.R.</i>
33	23	18	6	6	2

Have not put any child to school at all ?

TABLE 24  
NUMBER OF CHILDREN GETTING EDUCATION IN SCHOOL

Age group	Above 5-Below ten		Above 10-Below 16		Above 16 (beyond school level)	
Sex	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
	80	46	47	18	5	nil
	N=109	N=100	N=98	N=90		

These figures clearly indicate that though a fairly large number of children are initially put into school, few are able to continue schooling. The number who continue till higher education beyond school level are very few indeed. The number of school dropouts is alarmingly large; 41.25% in case of boys as they move from first age group to next and 60.8% in case of girls in the same age group and 93.75% in case of boys as they move from 2nd to 3rd age grade and 100% in case of girls in the same age grade translation.

Parents put their children into school with some positive advantages in mind. There are manifold problems that they face in allowing their children to continue. Both the initial decision to put the child into school, as well as the consequent decision to withdraw it, and the age at which this is done, are all affected by various socio-economic factors.

The various reasons given for putting children to school were as given below :

- Will improve their future, enable them to get a better living.
- Will be able to leave dhobi job for an uneducated boy cannot get a good job.
- For being able to read and write. Girls can write letters to their parents after marriage and boys would be able to deal with their clients and not get cheated in keeping accounts and counting.
- Because other people in the 'biradari' put their children in school.
- Because one boy in the family has been successful in getting a good job after studying.
- Because clients urged that you put your child to school

(with or without monetary help).

Those who have not put their children to school gave such reasons as it is too expensive and even educated boys do not get jobs; that children get spoiled if they go to school (i.e. pick up bad habits) or that there is simply no reason to put a child to school. Some consider education to have a negative effect on the life of a child because it takes him away from the aptitude of doing manual work.

However, as already demonstrated, even those children who go to school are to a large extent incapable of continuing. This can be due to the inability of the child itself to learn or adjust into the school environment. Many children run away from school because they are unable to adjust to the disciplined atmosphere, a complete contrast to their *laissez-faire* bringing up. Illiteracy of parents and lack of suitable facilities like books and exercise books also hamper education. Children fail repeatedly or are thrown out by the teachers when they show no progress, since most dhobis can afford to send their children only to the free government run institutions where teachers and the principal have no incentive in trying to keep a child in school. Especially one who is not able to cope with the studies and who may often misbehave or absent himself from school. The following narration of an informant will aptly illustrate these points, "the children used to fail regularly, did not learn anything. My daughter failed many times and was thrown out of school. I wanted to readmit her but the teachers in school refused to take her back, said she has no aptitude for studies. I told them to readmit her in the same class in which she had failed, yet they did not agree. The elder son, I kept in school for two years but he showed no progress. Now this younger son has failed in the sixth class but we will not take him out. He says that if we get him a tutor he will pass but we do not have the money for a private tutor".

Even if the child is doing well in school, economic reasons might force the parents to withdraw it. A child, among the dhobis, is a labour resource that can be utilized. By putting him to school this resource is lost to them, at least for the immediate time, since fruits of education are delayed and uncertain.

The immediate economic rewards that a child can bring by employing him in work like card cutting motor cleaning etc



coupled with the uncertainty about the usefulness of education affect the decision to let a child continue in school. It can be seen from our sample that children are put to school at the minimum age at which they can be admitted and withdrawn when they are about 10-11 years old. Now the latter is the age at which they became economically useful by either getting trained in traditional work, or the boys can be put into some non-traditional occupation, opportunities for which are provided by the changing economic environment.

Between the age of 5-10 years children are not useful. In fact, more of a nuisance for the mother who does not have time on her hand to look after them, coupled with the fact that they are too many in most households—(average number of children per couple is 4.8). Putting them in school takes them out of the way for a while and also does not strain the purse since primary education is free and stipends are provided to scheduled caste children for books and uniform.

Later on, if a child does not show promise there is no hesitation in taking him out of school. Girls, even if they want to study, are normally withdrawn after the age of 10 or 11 years or not sent to school at all, because they have a high labour value, for they can be of help around the house from even the tender age of five. Girls between the age of 10-15 years can be entrusted with a large share of the responsibility of performing household chores. Moreover, there is no positive advantage in educating a girl, since they are not expected to seek jobs anyway.

With regard to the boys, the parents normally desire that at least one or two should continue in education (if they can) so that they can later go into the more prestigious white collared jobs. Parents with several sons adjust in such a way that some continue in traditional occupation and others either take the non-traditional occupations in childhood, or obtain further education.

The overall attitude towards education by the elder generation is not an end in itself but only as a possible alternate to traditional mode of occupation. It is a suitable channel in which to direct the surplus labour force, worthwhile only if it enables the child, which has been educated, to get a good job.

This is clearly expressed in the attitude of the elders expressed

in moments of conflict and stress towards the educated, unemployed youth, who are ridiculed, looked down upon, with such taunts as "you are neither here nor there" i.e. are neither successful in getting a job, nor capable of doing manual work.

It is important to consider the dhobi as rational and trying to make the best out of his available resources. This is reflected in a number of decisions that he makes and attitudes that he adopts, like in educating or not educating his children, in training or not training them in the traditional work. In this attitude towards acquiring new clients and in economic cooperation. The decision to educate or not educate a child is effected to a large extent by the nonutilization of full energies in the traditional occupation. In fact the perception and use of education as an alternative channel for the utilization of energies and for the building up of another kind of resource, is a commendable example of rationality of thought on the part of a dhobi and of his ability to perceive and tap alternative resources.

The preference for jobs however is only an emergent value amongst the dhobis, it has not yet acquired universal proportions.

The answers to a question, namely—whether they prefer salaried job to the traditional occupation? and at what salary would a person be willing to give up the traditional occupation? yielded the following results:

TABLE 25

Total No. of informants—100

## CATEGORY OF INFORMANTS

	<i>Educated</i>				<i>Non-Educated</i>			
	<i>Above 40</i> N=3		<i>Below 40</i> N=21		<i>Above 40</i> N=35		<i>Below 40</i> N=40	
<i>Money for which will leave trade occupation</i>	<i>Will leave for amount</i>	<i>Will not leave for amount</i>	<i>Will leave for amount</i>	<i>Will not leave for amount</i>	<i>Will leave for amount</i>	<i>Will not leave for amount</i>	<i>Will leave for amount</i>	<i>Will not leave for amount</i>
Rs. 200/-	—		2	1	3	14	1	6
Rs. 300/-	1		2		1		8	
Rs. 400/-			4		6		5	
Rs. 500/-	1		3		4		10	
Rs. 600/-			3		1		2	
Rs. 800/-			1				1	
Rs. 2000/-							1	
	NR 1 NA		NR 2 NA 3		NR 6 NA		NR 2 NA 2	

Education seems to produce an inclination towards non-traditional occupation as is evident from the table. Education however has here (in this table) not been classified into the extent, under educated we have included education from 4th class up to graduation. The reasons for doing or not doing a job are various. For those already employed, there is no question of preference since they have already made their choice (These are the N.A. category). Those in the lower age group also show a slightly upward trend in preference for non-traditional occupation. However, the options are perceived both in terms of economic gain as well as in terms of ingrained values and enculturation.

The economic reasons stated were mainly inability to get a well paid job, especially for the uneducated ones. It would not be rational for them to accept a job that paid less than the traditional occupation. Any job that paid about Rs. 200-250/-, and that is the valid range which an uneducated men expects to get, will not carry with it sufficient prestige to act as an effective incentive. It may offer more leisure, a value that is not much sought after. The dhobis being untrained in any other field and not educated, realize that they can earn more in their traditional occupation compared to any other employment.

Those who are uneducated and young, expressed their willingness to accept jobs even in the lower pay-scales (around Rs. 300/- p.m.). This is because their labour is not being utilized in the household traditional work and most of them have little to do at home. A number of them, especially of the older generation expressed pride in their work and considered it better than salaried jobs.

Deeply ingrained in their minds is the fact that most of them have been brought up doing this work and it is part and parcel of their life style. Many of them expressed inability to do any other work than that of washing and ironing. In answer to the question as to—"whether he thinks he is capable of doing any other job than the traditional ?", we obtained the results as shown in the table 26.

Those who are young and educated have much greater confidence in their ability to do something other than the traditional work. We educated young men thought themselves capable of

TABLE 26  
TOTAL NO. OF INFORMANTS—102

<i>Education</i>	<i>Educated</i>				<i>Uneducated</i>			
<i>Age group</i>	<i>Above 40</i> <i>N=6</i>		<i>Below 40</i> <i>N=18</i>		<i>Above 40</i> <i>N=37</i>		<i>Below 40</i> <i>N=38</i>	
<i>Response to question</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
	3	3	14	4	7	24	13	25
	NA-2				NA-4		NR-3	

taking on clerical jobs in banks or government offices, as some of them have already been doing. Salesmen, peon, mechanic, book binder, paper cutter, milk vendor, scooter driver were some of the jobs mentioned by the young, yet less educated or uneducated persons. One young man said he could do anything that required physical labour but not brainwork. Some said given adequate capital they could do business. One of the popularly mentioned business was opening a drycleaning and laundry shop.

Those in the older age group showed much greater apathy in this respect. Most of them thought that they were incapable of doing any other work than traditional work. One valid reason was that they have spent a larger part of their life in the traditional occupation and are past their prime for trying to learn something new.

Those in the younger age-group yet uneducated, also did not express very great confidence in their ability to do something new. Their uncertainty arose out of a fear of not being able to earn enough in a non-traditional occupation, especially the fact that a monthly salary may not last the whole month. The dhobis, as already mentioned, spend their money as it comes. The day they earn well they eat a good meal, the day they do not earn well they may eat dry 'chappattis' with 'chutney'. They are not used to budgeting a fixed monthly income and spending evenly over the month. Since traditional occupation the earnings are on more or less on a daily basis they are habituated to buying and spending on a daily budget and adjusting their needs according to the cash in hand rather than saving or speculating for the future. Moreover in the traditional occupation they

can always take advances or borrow without interest from a client, an avenue which is closed to them in a non-traditional occupation.

Apart from economic considerations of less income and problems of budgeting, ideological grounds for not leaving the traditional occupation were given, mostly by the older generation. This was to do with the control of one's own labour resources. In the traditional occupation a man is master of his own self. Apart from the dictates of his work and the authority exerted by members of his own household he has full control over his own time and energy resources. He adjusts his own timetable according to the work at hand and has plenty of scope for manipulations in his own favour. He may postpone a work if he is not in a mood and work at a later time. He may spend less energy, if he cuts down on his consumption requirements. But in a job he is subordinate to another person and his time and energy are no longer his own. He has to move according to a schedule not controlled by him, an idea which is repellent to many of the older generation and even some of the younger generation, who have spent a large portion of their life working independently.

Added to all these factors is that of liking and disliking the traditional occupation in terms of enjoying it and taking a pride in it or finding it dirty and drudgery work. In answer to the question, "whether they liked the traditional occupation?" we obtained the following answers :

Q. Do you like the traditional occupation ?

TABLE 27

Education		CATEGORY OF INFORMANTS							
		Educated (%)				Un-educated (%)			
Type of work		Traditional	Non-trad.			Trad.	Non-trad.		
Response to the question	Yes	No	Ind.	Yes	No	Ind.	Yes	No	Ind.
% of information	12.5	62.5	25	0	100	0	50	12.3	23.3

Ind Indifferent,

Total No of informants 132,

Understandably those not engaged in the traditional occupation have no liking for it, as demonstrated in the table. According to one individual who is a bank clerk, "I enjoy doing service. The traditional work requires physical labour while service requires mental work. I got better company to work with and more respect in society".

A high percentage of those who have received some education (nobody with education beyond school level is occupied in traditional work) and most of whom belong to the younger age group (refer table—27) expressed a dislike for the traditional occupation. Reasons given were the heavy labour input and comparatively much less monetary returns and the unfavourable conditions of work. As one young man put it, "if it is raining you run helter-skelter, looking for a shelter for your dried up clothes and if it is windy you are left hanging after the clothes that are blown off." Other reasons given were the seasonal fluctuations in earnings. In winter the work load goes down considerably because woollens are rarely given to the 'dhobi' and cotton clothes can be worn for a longer period in the absence of perspiration and dirt. Many 'dhobis' find it extremely difficult to make two ends meet in winter, especially since they have little capacity for savings. Highlighting all these shortcomings is the lowly status of dhobi's work. A dhobi is, traditionally and still today, treated as a low-caste and disreputable member of society—given to bawdiness and drinking. A number of young men dislike not only the occupation but also the way of life that is associated with it.

Those who are uneducated and following the traditional occupation, to a large extent expressed satisfaction in their work. Their liking for it arises out of the fact that they have been born and bred in it and it provides them with two meals a day—which they have no alternate means of acquiring. It is the feeling that it is only the traditional occupation that can provide them with food to fill their stomachs that suffused into most of the answers. A large number in both the educated and non-educated group who are in traditional occupation expressed the feeling that the traditional work was only a means towards survival and to which they were clinging only in absence of a suitable alternative. The association with the dhobi work was only a

matter of earning one's bread. As we can see from the Table 27 this feeling of indifference was expressed by a fairly high percentage of informants.

The value of hard work as compared to leisurely activity also shows a gradient in terms of age. Those who belong to the older generation show pride in capacity for hard and sustained labour and consider this to be a greater value than education. The excerpt from the life history of a woman above the age of hundred years shows this, "I used to get up in the dark and cook the morning meal, tie it up and run to the 'ghat'. Sometimes I would get up at 3.00 a.m., sometimes 4.00 a.m. at night. I will 'study' till 11 p.m. and then sleep, and then get up in the morning and start 'studying' from 4 a.m. This was our 'studies'. We bring clothes from thousands of persons and then give them back cleaned. How do we do it? It is on the basis of our 'studies'. Our 'studies' is not to write 'abracabadra', our 'studies' was to mark the clothes with needle and thread. You give me a needle and thread and, write any word and I will make it out in needle and thread, much better than you can do with pen and paper.... I sent my son to the school, the master asked for a four anna bribe, four annas to teach him. I stopped the boy from going to school... the committee people sent for me and asked me to send my son back to school. I told them that the master asks for bribes, they said you send your boy back, the master will not do it again. I again sent my boy and told him not to bother even if the master did not teach him anything. Next time the master sent some clothes to be washed. When he came to collect his clothes, I gave him a cot and asked him to sit down. I got his ironed clothes and told him, Masterjee, read how many classes are there in these clothes, you go to school at 10 a.m. and come back at 4. p.m. and then relax. In this school in our house we start 'studying' at 4 a.m. and sleep at 11 p.m., while continuing to 'study' throughout the day. How many classes do we 'study'? The master said that 'matajee' I cannot 'study' your classes, it is not in my capacity. After that I never sent my boy to school.... I did not want him to study so I did not send him to school. The boy who studies does less work. An educated person cannot work the way we can work. The ones who do not study work much harder

Thus the value towards non-traditional occupations is the function of a complex interplay of ingrained cultural attitudes of an individual which are infused into his personality. This results from the process of socialization and life experience and the functioning of his mind as a rational thinking individual, who considers alternatives in front of him and chooses or rejects them as he considers appropriate to his well being. The self-assessment of an individual in terms of what he considers himself capable of doing is also important. This is influenced by his age and qualifications. The latter two also shape his preferences in terms of modifying the values that he holds like the young generation in comparison to those of the older generation may have different preferences.

On the whole, there is a tendency towards occupational diversification at the level of the younger generation. The elders prefer to stick to the traditional 'jajmani' kind of relationships or at the most to take on dhobi work with new clients. The reasons for this are several. First, for the older generations it is difficult to make a mental switch over, they prefer the personalized relationships with their clients that has its own fringe benefits. Moreover, it is not easy for them to acquire new skills and knowledge at a late age and such resources were not available to them when they were young. The younger generations are not only open to new channels of communication and knowledge, they are also presented with a diversified structure of economic opportunities. Most significantly, they have stepped into a new value system and have a spectra of goals and wants that are at least partially different from their elders.

The main occupations of 375 individuals were determined through the genealogies. The sample was divided into three age groups. Forty five and above, representing those who were adults thirty years back, at the time of India's Independence. And below forty five and above thirty, representing those who were children at the time of Independence, below thirty representing the younger generation, born after Independence. The significance of these divisions is obvious, taking into account the fact that the Independence of India has been taken as the reference point for change.



The divisions came as below :

TABLE 28  
TOTAL NO. OF INFORMANTS=375

Age group	Above 45 T=86		Between 45-30 T=105		Below 30 T=184	
Nature of Occupation	Non-Trad.	Trad.	Non-trad.	Trad	Non-trad.	Trad
No. of individuals	2	84	13	92	72	112
		Only iron washing & iron		Only iron washing & iron		Only iron washing & iron
	4	80	10	82	29	83

Trad.—Traditional

Occupation of those not engaged in traditional work

Age Group	No.	Occupation
Above 45	1	Dry cleaner
	1	Owner of tyre shop
45-30	2	Peons
	1	Milk vendor
	1	Salesman in cloth shop
	1	Servant in medicine shop
	2	Motor mechanics
	3	File cutting and book binding
	1	Dry cleaner
	1	Lower Division Clerk
	1	
Below 30	27	Book binding and paper cutting
	13	Motor mechanics
	12	Salesmen, mostly in cloth shops
	4	Bank clerks
	4	Servants in shops
	1	Chauffeur
	1	Works on a lathe machine
	1	Conductor in city bus service
	1	Television mechanic
	1	Screen printer
	3	Work in small scale industries

No.	Occupation
1	Tutions of school children
1	Work in thermal power station
1	Works in police station
1	Social worker

There are 24 children below the age of 16 years who work on daily wages in small scale industries like paper cutting and binding, some are apprentices to mechanics.

The occupations followed by individual dhobis also fluctuate over a life time and counting heads at any particular time may be misleading because some of them have been shifting from one occupation to another. Some have even reverted back to traditional occupation consequent to failure in the non-traditional field, while some have never entered the traditional work. An example of the former is Rohtash and of the latter is Mangalram.

Rohtash is about thirty years old and gave up his studies at the age of 16, after completing his tenth standard, to assist his ageing father in the washing of clothes. His father was about 50 years old at that time and his eyesight was failing. Rohtash was the eldest of his brothers and sisters. They got clothes to wash from a hotel and work was in plenty. Then the hotel closed down and they fell short of work. Rohtash borrowed some money, about Rs 500/- from his friends and went to Ludhiana from where he bought nylon sweaters to sell in Delhi. His enterprise succeeded and he made a profit. He continued in the work for three months, when suddenly the market for nylon sweaters slumped and he incurred a heavy loss. He next attempted to set-up a laundry shop at Shahdara—a suburb of the city of Delhi (it needed less capital to start the shop in a suburb than in main city) along with his wife, who was an expert at ironing clothes. He ran his shop well for several months when his wife fell sick and there was no one to iron the clothes.

He kept a servant, who cheated him on money and did not do the work well. He closed down his shop and came back to Delhi where he picked up a few clients and resumed his traditional occupation. He made several unsuccessful attempts to get a job in an office or bank as a clerk or peon and then gave it up.

The other example is 39-year-old Mangalram who entered paper cutting and binding industry as child he worked his way to

being a contractor for that job, he also became an expert card cutter. After 14 years at that job he got married after which he neglected his work for a few months, thereby losing all his contracts. He then started ironing clothes and also worked for Rs 30/- per month, selling milk at the dairy of a friend. After some time, he obtained a license for selling milk independently and has been selling milk for the past ten years. He next obtained driving license and intended giving up milk vending for scooter/taxi driving. However, he later combined milk vending with the running of a small restaurant in the neighbourhood.

This shifting and adjusting into different occupations indicates the difficulties faced by dhobis in finding a proper niche in the changing environment.

A significant fact that becomes evident when we look at the Table No.28 is that in each generation, the number of individuals carrying on traditional work is fairly constant and at no stage do we find a tendency for large scale switchover to other jobs. The complex process of decision making in this regard has already been discussed but it is essential to note at this point that the dhobi's traditional occupation (at this stage) is sufficiently viable.

Two distinct trends in change in occupation are perceptible at this stage. One is a change within the traditional occupation in which the earlier 'jajmani' type of clients are being replaced by a different type of clientele namely the business houses, hotels and hospitals. Or in what can be called establishment of ironing stalls where a dhobi, mostly a woman, stands whole day and irons clothes for money. In this kind of change the productive organization with its supporting socio-cultural aspects remains largely unaltered and only the exchange relations with the clients are affected.

From our sample we see that as yet a large number of the households are still washing clothes of the traditional type of clients. Those who have changed over to new clientele, most often retain at least a few households of the 'jajmani' kind of relationships. Even some of the households which earn a large part of their livelihood by ironing have not left washing altogether. Partly, the reason is that the new type of clientele, that is hotels, hospitals, cinema houses, business houses, are not easy to come by and there is a fierce competition for them and a

consequent fear of losing their business at any time. And then the relationship is formal and of a purely economic nature and some dhobis may not find themselves able to adjust in to such a relationship or know how to deal with the management of such places.

Most of those who have turned to other kind of work do retain some old clients because the enduring relation ship formed (sometiems over generations) makes it difficult to break off. Moreover, the fringe benefits derived from such clients make such a break off an unwelcome proposition. If the dhobi is able to get a hotel or business house which gives him good income but no fringe benefits, he retains, nonetheless, a few of his old clients for falling back in times of need. Only when the relationship with hotel or hospital or business house becomes firm and established and the income very good and the work load too heavy, then only a dhobi leaves the traditional kind of clientelle. That majority of dhobis still retain at least partly the old parsonalized kind of household washing is indicated by our sample.

TABLE No. 29

<i>Washing clothes of households only</i>	<i>Washing clothes of households as well as of hotels, hospi- tals etc.</i>	<i>Washing Only clothes iron only of hotels, business houses, hospitals</i>	<i>Some iron and some washing</i>
59	11	7	12

The second type of change that has come about, and which, as already mentioned involves only individuals and not total households, is a complete changeover to a different kind of occupation. More often than not, such change of occupation is associated with education. Thus the first type of change gives the dhobis a kind of economic viability in the changing economic environment and is also conducive to the 'biradari' and dhobi way of life. Education and different occupation, especially of the kind of white collared jobs that can be obtained with a fairly high education (like a bachelor's or master's degree) has its own value

system and goal orientation which is more towards individual achievement and is different from that of a traditional dhobi who is oriented towards the 'biradari'. But the dhobi culture and value system is deep rooted and deeply ingrained into an individual's personality. Even if one wants to, the stranglehold of the 'biradari' is difficult to break. If not for anything else but for the fact that an individual's identity and social nexus is within the 'biradari'. Thus the two different kinds of pulls experienced by the educated dhobi youth puts him into a dilemma and creates dissatisfaction and a sense of relative identity. Dhobi youth may disapprove of the traditional way of life. They consider their elders to be boorish and uncouth. They further want to identify with other educated youth of higher castes and social position with whom they came into contact during their school and college life. Nonetheless they are tied to their economic position and social background which makes assimilation into higher social circles difficult.

Within the 'biradari' an educated and well employed young man is given some degree of status and position but greater prestige is accorded to the father of the young man rather than to the young man himself. This transference of status to the father than to the youth is to a degree justified because the initial decision to educate and invest in the youth, for him to attain such a position, is the father's. Further, the strict rule of gerontocracy, which as we have already discussed, is essential to maintain the cohesiveness of the 'biradari', makes such a status transfer from the young to the old essential, for too much prestige accorded to the young would go against 'biradari' ideas.

Thus while the father of an educated, working son will have great say in 'biradari' matters, the son himself would be rarely allowed to make his point of view felt. If at all a young man has the audacity to open his mouth the elders 'pounce' upon him and ridicule him in such a way that he dare not open his mouth again. They would especially attack his predecessors and degrade them to an extent that whatever achievement the young man may have accumulated would assume negative value trying to compensate for the sins of his forebearers.

Thus the maximum a young man can deviate is in terms of his dress (which may be modern) speech (which may be refined) and

in restricting his associations within the 'biradari'. He attend many weddings and social gatherings. He may to extend friendship networks outside the 'biradari', though circumscribed by his socio-economic position. Thus change in occupation, nor education, is able, as yet, to about deep-rooted changes in the 'biradari' organization.

## THE BIRADARI—AN ANALYTICAL VIEW

Analysis of the economic behaviour and economic change can be done on the basis of attributing an overall unintentional rationality to any system. In this case it was the 'biradari' functioning as social security or 'minimal subsistence' fulfilling body that provided a (unintentional) systems rationality or social rationality.

Let us now construct an analytical picture of the 'biradari'. We had seen that the 'biradari' shows fissiparous tendencies at times when it grows fairly large. Size is a relative concept but for our purpose here we assume that small 'biradari' is one that has the possibility of the participation of all the members in activities. Such participation and interaction is obviously necessary for the 'biradari' to function as a security providing body. The exact demographical size at which the 'biradari' had split in the earlier times is not known but a hint is provided by its present size (about 300-350 households totalling about 1500 members) because fissiparous tendencies have set in and the

There were general complaints from its members regarding its present day size, that the 'biradari' had grown too big for total participation of all members in activities such as marriage and adoption which traditionally require presence of all 'biradari' members. This would also explain why there has been a persistent resistance to the idea of the sheheri 'biradari' merging with other dhobi 'biradaris'. On one pretext or the other the merger has always been put off.

Endogamy is essential for the continuity of the 'biradari' and all possible pressures are exerted on a boy or girl to conform, like engagements at a very young age and the role of elders in negotiating a match. For the individual, the rationality of endogamy is in the fact of harmony in marital life and in problems of adjustment. The marriage situation is one that plays up, quite clearly, the dominance of the social over the individual. Individual likes and dislikes in terms of beauty, compatibility and companionship are played down to give prominence to social values such as group solidarity, identity and continuance of the traditional way of life. A girl's proficiency in traditional work is of greater marriage value than a beautiful face.

Biradari participation is necessary for those rituals and ceremonies like marriage and adoption which have a legal nature, thus emphasizing the sanction providing and law giving mechanism of the 'biradari'. Purely ritual occasions like religious ceremonies and festival celebrations like Holi, Diwali, etc. do not call for total 'biradari' participation. Birth and death, two occasions which signify the entry and exit of an individual from the 'biradari' require such participation. Both of these factors have to be given legal sanction by the presence of all members.

It has already been mentioned that the dhobis do not call a 'pandit' to sanctify their marriages as is customary among Hindus. Since the jural status of the 'biradari' is in itself sufficient to legalize and sanctify a marriage, the 'pandit' is not necessary to give further ritual sanctification. An elder of the 'biradari' has the requisite authority to sanctify any union in the presence of all 'biradari' members. Similarly, the stability of a marriage derives not from its sacred nature but from the sanctions imposed by the 'biradari'.

The total participation of the biradar to legitimize member



ship and legal relationships also points to an important characteristic, that the 'biradari' is always seen as a whole. It is for this reason that the formal jural institution of the panchayat means total 'biradari' representation through the heads of each household.

The 'biradari' as a jural body not only parallels legal institutions but in providing social and economic security it also takes up largely the functions of the joint family. Moreover, due to the intensive and cross cutting ties of marriage and kinship enforced by a bilateral system of kin reckoning, the extended kin group becomes more or less synonymous with the 'biradari'. As we had shown earlier in the chapter—The Actor—an individual's enculturation is not based on internalization of values and skills pertaining to individual parents or families but into the 'biradari' through the traditional occupation. That is the child grows up more or less in the community kind of living practised in the 'katras', with minimum individual effort by parents, who function only to give it sustenance and initiate it into the traditional occupation. The process of learning is not invested specifically in parents and family. Thus the replacement of the family by the 'biradari' reduces the importance of the extended family which very easily breaks up into nuclear production, consumption units through a process of individual decision-making as has already been discussed.

We have shown that the actual break up takes place through an individual process of maximization whose rationality at the situational level is explained by the fact of optimum utilization of labour resources. At the same time this individual rationality is only a reflection or aspect of the social rationality provided by the system of socialization, security of the 'biradari'. The extended family being replaced by the 'biradari', in terms of closed living in 'katras', cooperation and security being provided by 'biradari' members. The fact that smaller units are more productive in situations where the authority structure is diffuse (the diffuse authority structure being related to the frequent or moment to moment decision-making required in the context of the particular technological and economic process) gives us the rationality for the division of labour within the dhobi productive system as a whole.

Ideally, given the close-knit structure of the 'biradari', there is a possibility that one may have a community division of labour such that the whole 'biradari' functions together as a productive unit. But here again we have the same dilemma of the diffuse authority structure. Large productive units can only be activated under centralized leadership; but the very norms of the 'biradari' goes against any such centralization, for that would imply hierarchy and the 'biradari', as we have seen, even as a jural body functions in totality, without centralized authority or delegated authority. Even the "Chaudharies" are important more in their relationships as links with the outside, than in their functioning within the 'biradari', where authority lies in consensus. Hence the unit of production is the household and optimally the nuclear household, which is the smallest possible unit under the circumstances.

The sharing of productive goods and continued cooperation in work, even after separation, shows clearly the operation of an individual's efforts to reach optimal levels of achievement. On the one side by increasing productivity by limiting size of productive unit; on the other side by enlarging accessibility to productive goods through a system of sharing. The economic cooperation of the extended kin group and even of the other members of the 'biradari' is a manifestation of the security provided by the 'biradari'.

This view is supported by the empirical evidence that wherever we have a community kind of living with close face to face kind of personalized relationships as e.g. in peasant societies, it is the nuclear family that abounds. "In most peasant groups nuclear families are the most common domestic unit even though formal patterns of kinship reckoning, inheritance, rule of residence and the members, own statements point towards extended families as typical" (Diaz & Potter, 1967 p. 155).

Individual rational behaviour in educating children has also been explained in detail and clearly points to the fact that children are educated only when there is a clear realization that they cannot be absorbed into the traditional occupation. Moreover, education also provides an alternate to traditional occupation that is neutral. By taking a white collared or blue collared job one is not violating caste norms because these jobs are out,

side the traditional scheme of purity and pollution. So that if by the exigencies of having a surplus of labour in the traditional occupation one is forced to look out for greener pastures, care is taken that these should not violate norms that can throw one out of the 'biradari'. That is if one cannot remain within the traditional occupation then one should try and do something by which one can still remain within the 'biradari' and not be a dhobi. So that the 'biradari' is again at the back of individual level decisions on taking up particular types of occupations like mechanic, salesman or clerk and rejecting others like vegetable vendor, rickshaw puller, cobbler, or scavenger, economic motivations notwithstanding.

Membership of the 'biradari' in terms of residence, endogamy and even indulgence in part time traditional occupation is still sought by those who have taken up non-traditional occupations. Then, there is a recognized and generalized tendency to overrate such non-traditional occupations as are being pursued by these people, like a peon would be identified as a clerk, a clerk as an officer; a business man would be described as a 'crorepati' (multimillionaire) and so on. All these glorifications suggest justifications in terms of over-emphasized compensation in leaving the traditional occupation and thus at least taking the first step outside the secure world of the 'biradari'.

Similarly, even when it comes to doing business, by far the most popular business conceived by the dhobis is laundry shops and drycleaning shops, which is only a modernized version of their traditional occupation. The operation of social rationality is aptly reflected in the answers to the question "For how many rupees worth of job would you give up the traditional occupation?". Now here most dhobis who were already employed in the traditional occupation quoted an absurdly high figure. This quotation can be seen as an individually maximizing behaviour of trying to get the maximum out of a situation but it is better explained by the fact that these people were taking into account not merely the economic gain involved in switching from one occupation to another but the loss of social security provided by the 'biradari' via the medium of the traditional occupation. A parallel instance is given by Ernestine Friedl (1959) of the Irish countryside where there is strong partilineal

n with

land holding. A man who comes to reside into his wife's family as a result of her not having any brother, to continue the patriline age and take care of the family land, brings with him a brideprice in excess of the wealth he is to inherit from his father-in-law. The large bride-price is compensatory not only for the inheritance of family wealth but also of family status associated with the land.

Again the status of an individual is drawn from his position as a member of the 'biradari', so that any economic incentive should take care of the status factor as well, apart from the security factor. This is shown very well through the pattern of consumption. Individuals tend to spend much more on occasions relating to the 'biradari' than to the individual households. In fact there is very little a dhobi consumes that is free from the gaze of his fellow 'biradari'. Due to the particular type of housing and living pattern in which they exist, even the food cooked in anybody's house is open to scrutiny by fellow 'biradari' members living in the same 'katra'. Further, there is also greater emphasis on items of display than on items of consumption for individual or household comfort. Like expenditure on marriage, birth and death exceed by far the expenses on celebration of rituals of the Hindu calendar like Holi and Diwali unless the expenditure is on presentations (to a daughter and sister) where it again links up with marriage and becomes a 'biradari' affair. At the marriage we have shown that the expenditure is pooled together by the members of the kin group and the norm is for each person to contribute the maximum that he or she can so that a household need not be well-off by itself to put up a good display, it can achieve the same by having well placed kin. The rationality here is clearly linked up with the prestige of the household within the 'biradari', for prestige is a direct correlate of the capacity to display. Moreover it also indicates an important fact that the achievement of one individual or household is the achievement of the entire first order kin.

In terms of 'biradari' this has an important consequence for, as already pointed out, the combined effort of all households (or kin groups) to spend the maximum possible on important occasions raises the status of the 'biradari' vis-a-vis other groups for the 'biradari' then comes to be regarded as one with

rich members for they spend so much. Thus the consumption behaviour, which is economic, is clearly conditioned by the social rationality.

The pattern of mate selection which has the rule that one cannot take a woman from a household to which one has given a woman serves further to cement the cohesive relations within the 'biradari'. Further, there is always a tendency for repetitive marriages i. e. moving in the same direction like giving one's daughter into a household where one has given one's sister. (Levi Strauss, 1969).

So far we have talked only of cohesiveness, let us now take up the aspects of conflict and competitiveness. Schneider has explained conflict through the process of maximization (Schneider, 1970). Here we shall show that in our case conflict is explained through the same social rationality that explains cohesion. "As it is I have had to be content with merely indicating the possible explanation for various actions, in terms of a decision making model that assumes that each in turn is attempting to maximize his own utility" (Schneider, 1970, p. 4).

Amongst the dhobis the key situation of conflict is a marriage; whenever there is a marriage there is inevitably conflict between the bride's party and the groom's party. Now marriage taken in an overall perspective what it provides the cohesion of the 'biradari' through endogamy. But we have seen all through that the 'biradari' operates and is seen as whole. The integrative function which any specific marriage normally performs between two different parties and their respective kin groups is in a way redundant because the two parties are already integrated into a close knit kin group which in its widest ramification encompasses the entire 'biradari', so that here when any marriage takes place it is not between two unrelated parties but two parties which are part of the same extended kin network i. e. the 'biradari'. In fact the dhobis themselves make it clear that there is no actual distinction between the boy's side and the girl's side because both sides are already related to each other through multiple kin ties. So that marriage celebration, actually exhibits a breaking up, in the situation of marriage, an already cohesive entity into two factions namely the boy's party and the girl's party

Now culturally with reference to the wider Hindu culture the boy's party is superior to girl's party and is justified or expected to behave in a superior fashion. But here the actors themselves find it difficult to make the distinction between the two parties which is for all practical purposes artificial and situational. The people who have allied themselves to the girl's household to form the girl's party find it difficult and incongruent to accept the supercilious airs of the boy's party, inevitably flaunted by them as a matter of right, and the conflict between the two attitudes leads to heated debates, much abusing and fighting all catalyzed by liberal consumption of alcohol. In fact a dhobi wedding is not a wedding if there are no quarrels or fights.

However, such conflict as leads to crystallization of factions, leading to fission is seen as a resultant of the operation of the social rationality of the system in limiting its size as discussed in the early part of this chapter. Thus in the first case conflict has situational implications only, and the ultimate outcome of a marriage is to cement the bonds of cohesion of the 'biradari' and the second case conflict has more enduring repercussions and carried to a fulfilment of an end which incidentally is the same as in the first case, both being an outcome of the systems rationality.

One field of competition is in respect to clients. Now the competitive attitude towards clients has only been explained on the basis of individual rationality, that clients are scarce. However, if we refer to the diagram in the earlier chapter on 'biradari' we find that clients lie outside boundary of the 'biradari' by the very definition of 'biradari'. Hence lying outside the system they are not subject to the social rationality of the particular system. In their relationship to their clients the dhobis cross over the boundaries of the system in which they are placed and enter another system, the urban, market network governed by its own rationality. So the actors likewise behave according to the rationality of the system in which they are now operating, which is individualism and competition.

Here an interesting historical development can be referred to. Earlier like in the 1930's, the relationship of the dhobis with their clients followed the traditional pattern of the *jaman*.

'kamin' relationship. Now the 'jajman' or the client in such a situation also belonged to a traditional system which was similar to the 'biradari' of the dhobis. Reference can be made here to the community life of the Aggarwals in the thirties who lived within the walled city and who formed a large part of the clientele of the dhobis (Channa, V.C. : 1979, p.14 and p 24—32).

The quality of the relationship between the dhobis and their clients, when both belonged to similar systems, whose boundaries touched was of an entirely different nature than when under the impact of the forces of change the social system of the clients dissolved beyond recognition and took on characters of the fast spreading urban economic network that encompassed the city. The dhobi 'biradari' was left floating on a sea of atomistic, individual, market dominated relationships and there occurred considerable changes in the relationships between clients and dhobis.

Earlier, the social rationality governing both systems in which the dhobis and the clients were localized was similar. Hence, the relationships joining the two were of a personalized, enduring kind, and the competitiveness as that characterises the relation of dhobis with their clients today was absent; it was quasi-hereditary and formalized on the basis of 'jajmani' relationship. The transformation of the outer system served to completely delink the dhobi 'biradari' from it and the clients steadily became part of the faceless, formal market relationship that surrounded them from all sides and likewise their behaviour in relation to the clients changed.

One conspicuous characteristic mentioned almost throughout has been the disinclination of the dhobi to accumulate capital or even to invest in property. There is rarely any futuristic planning indicated by the virtual absence of immovable property and very little by way of movable property accumulated by an individual over a life time. This kind of lack of 'psychological participation in property' (Lauriston Sharp, 1934—35), is a dominant characteristic of the dhobis.

We have already discussed the tendency of the dhobi to invest in 'biradari' ties rather than invest in the interest of his individual self. It is the 'biradari' that as a security giving agency,

replaces property. In all cultures property has two major functions, the first is security (delayed consumption) and the second status, prestige and power might lie either in accumulation of property as in all capitalist societies or in its accumulation and destruction as among the Kwakiutle or in accumulation and distribution as among Tolait (Epstein, 1968). But among the dhobis both security, prestige and power derive from the 'biradari' and hence the idea of property is redundant leaving individuals with no desire to invest in it. It is only with the modification of the idea of prestige within the 'biradari' that persons are acquiring any taste for buying prestige goods.

The sense of security still lies with the 'biradari'. However, some changes in the security giving function have come about over time. Earlier there was no individual concern for security, the idea being totally vested in the 'biradari'. But today as a result of all the forces of change operating, the social rationality of the outer system (which is often confused with individual rationality or is taken as such where the individual stands for himself and by himself) has come to affect the social rationality of the dhobi system in such a way that security has to have some individual basis as well, but it is again the 'biradari' that provides the security.

Frank Cancian in his work on economic change among the Zinacantans has taken a similar stand. He postulates, with the understanding that the Zinacantans are economically rational men, their decisions are influenced by non-economic factors. In this case, uncertainty produced by a lack of knowledge and communication gap with outsiders coupled with another variable, namely rank in a stratification system. To quote Cancian, "Much human behaviour involves substantial uncertainty of some kind. The actor often proceeds without being sure of the outcomes of his actions in a situation where highly undesirable outcomes may be as likely as highly desirable ones. This is certainly the situation of the many Zinacantecos who adopted the new farming and marketing practices described above. They took chances, whereas those who retained traditional practices did not. In this chapter I will present a general theory relating rank in a stratification system and inclination to take chances and will then test



the dhobis we find that there is a bare hairline difference between earnings and subsistence consumption, so that for most of his conspicuous consumption a dhobi has to go into debt. Conspicuous consumption is not only a levelling mechanism but also a surety that by going into debt a dhobi has no potential to build up any property. Indebtedness, a persistent feature of the dhobi's economy is a kind of systems insurance that individuals would be restricted in their property building and entrepreneurial activities. Considering the fact that most debts are incurred for 'biradari' activities, only reinforces this argument.

The refusal of the dhobis to give up their traditional technology even though it is underproductive has been linked with his refusal to give up the traditional way of life linked to the 'biradari'. We have seen how the change in the pattern of consumption also side-steps such changes as would interfere with the traditional work organization and patterned lifeway associated with it. Similarly the changes in occupation indicate that by and large, the number of individuals in traditional occupation in three generations have remained fairly constant. All this indicates that as far as the sheheri dhobis are concerned there has not been appreciable economic change in Epstein's term of "Changes in economic roles and relations" (Epstein, T.S. 1962).

As we have shown, change is a function not only of the process of individual decision making in an economically rational way but that individual rationality may be conditioned by the social rationality of the system. As long as the individuals are sheltered by the security provided by the 'biradari' and they do not perceive any alternate optimal minima being provided by the wider society for either the group or individual, there will be a hesitancy towards changing in any fashion in which they stand in the danger of losing the minimal security provided by the 'biradari'.

Only at such time as the optimal minima provided by the 'biradari' becomes redundant to them (like when they are educated and have good jobs) will they step outside. Alternatively if the wider society through its own technological advancement is able to replace the optimal minima provided by the 'biradari' (as in technologically advanced societies by social welfare etc.) or to make the dhobi work dispensable for the rest of the society

by providing technological alternatives.

The threat to the 'biradari' from within however comes with the changing value system. Their values are being increasingly affected by the values of the wider society e.g. education and a white collared job, which is one of the new status symbols within the 'biradari'. Till such time as today, when education and a non-traditional occupation is only a first generation phenomenon, the 'biradari' is able to absorb those in non-traditional occupations because the change is individual and not household based, and as we have shown that even when one member of any household is in non-traditional occupation, the daily routine and life-way of the household continues as in traditional occupation.



## CONCLUSION

In conclusion we might take a look at the sheheri dhobis as they exist today. The dhobi operates in three dimensions. On the one hand, as an individual he has his very personal goals and aspirations and his personal needs and desires to fulfil. Then, as a sheheri dhobi, he is part of a system called the 'biradari' and lastly as a part of a metropolitan urban centre he is part of a wider system. Each of these dimensions, though logically and analytically separate, are, in reality, not mutually exclusive and the dynamics of existence of the dhobi, in the three dimensions, is the reality of his existence today.

What a dhobi is, is shaped by the system in which he exists and we have analytically defined this system as the 'biradari', but the 'biradari' does not exist in isolation either, it exists in an environment, complex and urban. The environment embodies a value system that is a derivative of the capitalistic, western market economy ; it is individualistic, non-traditional and lays emphasis on changing rather than customary behaviour. In contradiction the value system of the biradari is historically evolved substantive in c and sanctioned through cus-

In this dissertation we have shown how the traditional work organization with its supportive technology is retained. This is essential for the continuance of the traditional way of life. While changes are taking place in such aspects of their economy in which the dhobis can maximize as individuals, they do not go against the social rationality.

In their life ways and pattern of consumptions the dhobis cannot, and do not, remain totally unaffected by the value system of the world outside the 'biradari'. The decisions taken by the individuals are in such ways as to change within limitations of the social rationality.

The broadening of opportunity structures and the availability of erstwhile inaccessible resources like education, have certainly broadened out the aspirational pattern of the dhobis. This has affected individual rationality in such a way as to emphasize more upon individualistic maximization behaviour in contrast to the traditional times when individual rationality was by and large a complement of customary behaviour. But in spite of the changing values, individual rationality continues to be within the bounds laid by social rationality. Obvious contradictions between the two being smoothened out by changes in the values of the system itself. Thus we can say that the values of the system are evolutionarily adaptive to the environment to enable the social rationality of the system which is the minimal survival security of the members of the system, to be operative.

Thus changes in the economic behaviour are such as to ensure survival of the dhobis as dhobis and of their own way of life and this is possible only if a new economic viability is given by the dhobis to their occupation in response to the changing demands of the environment in which they are placed. Thus when the demand for washing of household clothes has gone down, it has been replaced by the washing and ironing requirements of new-found institutions like business houses, hotels and hospitals and also by the setting up of ironing stalls.

The social and economic security of the 'biradari' is like a cocoon from which few persons are ready to take a plunge outside. The emotional security, the feeling of 'belongingness' the security of having limited achievement scales, whose reference points lie within the 'biradari', make conformance to 'biradari,

values at last to the extent that conformance ensures existence and continuance of biradar is an attractive proposition. Again, the dhobis are tied down to the 'biradari' through involuntary mechanisms—such as the caste values operative in the total society of which the dhobis are a part. A person identified as a dhobi has little chance of acceptance into wider social circles, unless he is able to show extraordinary achievement and even then he only becomes a glorified dhobi.

The economic consideration of finding alternative occupation is another confining force. The outer system is not able to generate enough economic alternatives to dhobi work to absorb them as non-dhobis. Nevertheless, it is able to provide some economic viability to the traditional occupational structure so an average dhobi finds it economically more advantageous to continue as a dhobi than to take a plunge outside.

Even now the stresses and strains exist in varying degrees for different categories of dhobis. The older people show far greater adjustment to their way of life because they have been socialized into the 'biradari' values at a time when caste values were strong. At that time an individual's identity and aspirational pattern were strictly confined to their respective caste groups and dhobis could not exist as anything else but dhobis.

The new generation has the problem that they are not totally satisfied with their identity as dhobis. A feeling triggered off by the fact that they have been brought up in a society which is at least ideally secular and caste-free as the values adopted by the government of free India. Certain privileges like free education, jobs etc. are available to them which were not available to the older generation who lived in a society dominated by ascriptive rather than achieved statuses. But the frustrations in practical terms result from the gap between ideology and practice as it exists in Indian society today. In spite of the dilution of caste values in urban centres, after over thirty years of Independence, caste still exists as an identity system.

Whatever progress a dhobi may achieve in the direction of being a non-dhobi, like getting education, getting a secular, non-caste based occupation, or by getting into business or through political activity, he is still identified as a dhobi. Consciousness of the identity becomes acute when it comes to matters closely

related to marriage and other forms of social intercourse. Thus educated dhobi boys are still marrying, howsoever reluctantly, illiterate girls from their own 'biradari'. Neither would a person from a higher caste group give them their daughter nor would the dhobis marry into a caste below themselves.

The dhobi children are given all opportunities to obtain education, yet in the educational institutions they are branded as Scheduled Castes. The benefits of free education, stipend etc. are available to them only as members of Scheduled Castes. In fact the dhobis themselves prefer the label because of the economic and political benefits they derive from it in spite of the social setback. Thus the outer system gives them acceptance at one level and yet rejects them at another level.

'Biradari' thus becomes important to an individual not only because of its positive attributes but also by the negative ones of rejection and non-acceptance by the outer system. An educated dhobi man with a white collar job has practically no importance in the wider society but he has very high status within his 'biradari' hence the greater personal satisfaction derived from the 'biradari' would make him turn towards it, in spite of the clash of his own individualistic ideology with that of the 'biradari'. The strength of the 'biradari' lies in the inadequacy of the individual to fend for himself. Rising from their lowly socio-economic position, the dhobis have a long ladder to climb, till they come up to the level of achievement that would give them total acceptance into the wider society. Till such time the satisfactions derived from the 'biradari' will make the individuals remain within it, in spite of all stresses and strains.

The changes in individual aspirational levels through the outer environment serve in their total effect to modify the value system of the 'biradari' itself. The concept of status within the 'biradari' has changed to being more compatible with the outside system. This facilitates the coexistence of the individual in the wider society and the 'biradari'. Today when an individual dresses better he is responding to the values of the wider society as well as raising his status within the 'biradari'.

The 'biradari' is an organization that provides security to the individual, at least a minimal security of survival in case of social or economic distress. The *raison-d'être* of the sub-caste is

'biradari' i.e. the local endogamous group is to provide a minimal amount of security to the individual. This appears to be a vital function of the caste system. The caste system will thus continue as long as it provides the individual, security from social and economic impoverishment. This function can only be replaced by alternative institutions such as the ones found in the developed economies of the world.

It is true that caste has taken on new functions which are largely political in nature but to be a political force, caste units numbering in thousands with unified economic and social interests are necessary. To be a political force the sheheri dhobis could identify themselves with the wider occupational group of Delhi dhobis or Indian dhobis. This trend seems to be in evidence with the formation of such bodies as the Delhi Dhobi Association and the All India Dhobi Mahasabha. But such a trend of emphasis on the caste occupational status and political functions thereof would itself mean a dilution in emphasis, if not a breakdown of the 'biradari' as a localized endogamous body with consequent merger into a much wider group.

The decreasing emphasis on 'biradari' values are in evidence in the adoption of new ways of dress, adornment, entertainment, adoption of new status symbols and in getting education and taking on new jobs. There is little to distinguish the dhobi youth of today in dress, appearance, and involvement with the Hindi cinema from his non-dhobi peer group. There are changes in the performance of marriage rituals, wherein more and more are the ways of the higher caste being adopted. New rites-de-passage like celebrations of birthdays are being incorporated which is an entirely modern phenomenon derived from the western model.

Signs of the clash of values between the older and the younger people also exist and are evident in the breaking of engagements made in childhood, in delayed age at marriage, in reluctant participation of the youth in 'biradari' activities, in challenging the authority of the 'chaudharies' in imposing their will on the 'biradari' and in trying to bring about reforms like reducing alcoholic consumption. These are the first few changes that are the signs of what is to come. Adoption of values of marriage and individual achievement of the wider society might well be the  
of the end of the 'biradari'



Some of the younger generation parents have taken to educating their daughters and practising family planning and not socializing their children into the traditional occupation. Modernization has filtered into consumption activities and old habits like the smoking of the 'hookah' has been given up for the cigarette. The fading away of the practice of smoking hookahs is almost symbolic of the dilution of the concepts of purity and pollution which was closely associated with the smoking of the 'hookah'.

The dhobi youth of today are extending their friendship networks outside of their caste group. They mix together, eat together and rub shoulders with members of higher caste groups without the latter having to take purificatory baths.

But all the changes that have occurred or are occurring have till date been largely contained by the over arching ideology of the 'biradari'. The fundamental social and economic relationship, and values that constitute the 'biradari' like kinship, endogamy, economic co-operation remain practically unchanged, only a new values and cultural elements have changed. But however superficial the changes may be, they are a movement towards a new direction. And whichever be the factors that lead to a break down of the 'biradari' they would be supported by some of the changes in values that have already occurred.

### Notes

1. *Mother Goddess*—The worship of the Mother Goddess, who may be a manifestation of the Goddess Parvati, consort of Shiva, in the forms of Durga or Kali, the most popular of her forms, is associated with the worship of Shakti. Shakti implies the life force of the universe and the worshippers of Shakti offer libations of blood and alcohol to the Mother Goddess as symbolic of life and strength.
2. *Holika*—The story symbolizes the triumph of Good over Evil. The saintly boy Prahlad was sought to be killed. A woman, Holika, who had the boon that she will not be killed by fire, was asked by the wicked prince to hold the child Prahlad, in her lap, while a fire was lit around them. Miraculously, Holika, the evil one, perished in the fire, while Prahlad the holy one survived. Holi is a festival.

- which is celebrated to signify the destruction of Holika.
3. *Emergency*—In 1975-76, Smt. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, declared a state of internal emergency in the country. A large number of disciplinary steps were taken during this period, conspicuous among them being the clearance of slums from within the city and resettlement of the displaced persons in resettlement colonies in Trans-Jamuna localities. Since the dhobis quite often inhabited slum like pockets in the old city, quite a few of them were affected by the resettlement operations.
  4. 26th of January is Republic Day and a landmark by which this woman was able to remember the exact birth date of her child. Normally, among traditional dhobis few persons remember birth dates. There is a general incomprehension regarding exact ages. Men, who have been to school, may be able to tell their ages even if approximately. Women, on the other hand appear quite blank, when asked their age. At the best, they may give an approximation, by the ages of their children, brothers and sisters etc. The idea of seniority and juniority, rather than exact age, is culturally important to them.



## APPENDIX—I

### Glossary

- Alta : red juice of a berry, used by the dhobis for marking clothes.
- barat : Marriage procession in which the bridegroom goes to the bride's house to get married.
- bhabi : brother's wife.
- bhangi : sweeper.
- bhat : ritual prestation given by the women's natal household at the birth and marriage of her children.
- bhatti : an oven specially designed to steam clothes.
- bidi : small rolls of tobacco in leafs for smoking.
- bilama : a berry which secretes black juice used by dhobis for marking clothes.
- bilayati : foreign.
- chamar : an untouchable who works with leather.
- chappatis : unlewed bread.
- choli : a short blouse
- choudhury : an elder, respected man.
- chullah : a mud and iron stove lit with coals, used for cooking.
- churma : a specially prepared sweet prepared at the birth of a child by frying several ingredients—almonds, coconut, gole makhane, sugar, raisins and suji together in pure ghee then pounding and then into a powder and rolling up into balls.
- chutney : A savoury accompaniment to food prepared by grinding together uncooked ingredients like coriander mint leaves, onions, garlic, green chillies, green mangoes or any other varieties of these.

- daal : lentils.
- desi : native.
- dhoti : a long cloth used for wrapping around the middle by men.
- didī : Elder sister.
- diwali : a Hindu festival celebrating the triumph of Lord Rama over Ravana. Celebrated by lightening lamps and firing crackers.
- dosa : a South Indian preparation. A kind of pancake made out of rice and daal ground together.
- dupatta : a long scarf worn around the neck and over the head.
- ghee : clarified butter.
- gole : the seeds of the lotus flower.
- makhane
- gujiya : a sweet made like a stuffed pancake with flour and suji and sugar.
- halwai : a man who prepares sweet meats.
- halva : a sweet made with suji, sugar and ghee.
- hauda : large vessel used for washing clothes.
- holi : a Hindu festival in which coloured water and colour are thrown.
- Holika : see notes.
- hookah : a hubble bubble.
- hookah pani : a symbolic representation of participation in biradari activities—smoking of the hubble bubble and drinking water from the 'biradari' pitcher kept at the place where the biradari meets.
- Jaimala : A ceremonial exchange of garlands between bride and bridegroom
- Jagaran : a night long singing of hymns in the praise of the Goddess Durga
- Katha : The recitation and explanation verses from a holy scripture.
- kheer : a sweet made of thickened milk, rice and sugar.
- laddu : a dry sweet, round in shape made from gum flour
- agan : a ceremony in which the date of the wedding is fixed.
- lahnga : a full skirt

malhas	: low caste who run boats.
mali	: gardner
mitti	: earth
mohalla	: neighbourhood
Mundan	: a ceremonial head shaving of a child
Nai	: barber
Nyota	: ceremonial gift
Pallav	: The end of the saree that is draped across the shoulder and over the head.
Pair pujan	: pair-feet, pujan-worship—feet worship
Pandit	: Brahmin priest
Panch	: Five
Panchayat	: Council of five elders
Pehalwan	: a wrestler and strong man
Prasad	: offerings made to God that are later distributed among devotees.
Pucca ghat	: Cement and concrete washing places
Puja	: worship
Purdah	: Veil
Puries	: puffed and deep fried pancakes
Rabri	: thickened and sweetened milk
Radha	: Mythological figure—the beloved of Lord Krishna
Rickshaw	: a two wheeled vehicle which is either pulled manually or with a cycle.
Roti	: baked pancakes of dough
Sat Narain	: A recitation and explanation of verses in praise of Lord Krishna.
Katha	: Engagement
Sagai	: a measure of weight approx. 1 kg
Seer	: a decorative tent hoisted for festive occasions
Shamiana	: coarse ground wheat flour, semolina
Suji	: cart
Thela	: anointment, also a piece of jewellery worn on the forehead.
Tikka	: A measure of weight equivalent to 11.76 gm, normally used for measuring gold and silver
Tola	

## APPENDIX II

### Primitive Economics

Definitions of institutions in primitive societies have largely been derived from identifications of similarities from the society to which the anthropologist belongs. Thus while the traditional anthropologists easily identified and studied institutions such as family and kinship because of basic resemblances to their own parallel institutions they largely ignored economics as it is studied in their own societies. The reason was that at first glance no discernible institution with primarily economic functions was available in any primitive society. Malinowski pioneered the study of primitive exchange system in his work on the Kula exchange rings but without labelling it as economics.

However no society can exist in which the members do not go about fulfilling the basic requirements of living—obtaining a livelihood, providing themselves with food and shelter and in the process entering into some form, however rudimentary of exchange and bargaining. It took some time for anthropologists to dissociate function from structure and realize that although the overt structures did not exist the basic economic functions were certainly being performed albeit by non-economic institutions.

To understand the manner in which economic functions are fulfilling in societies in which no specific institutions exist for the purpose, we shall divide the economic process into the three divisions into which it is frequently divided for analytic purposes. These are Production, Consumption and Exchange.

**Production.** In the most general definition production consists of transformation of available raw materials in the environment to useful ones for the purpose of direct or indirect consumption. In the simplest of economies the productive process is acquisitive

rather than transformative. Such economies are associated mostly with the simplest form of social structure—the nomadic bands. The tribes organized into these bands are found in the remotest areas, usually deep jungles or mountainous terrains. They acquire a living by gathering wild fruits and tubers and hunting wild animals. Since the tribe depends on the natural environment for its survival—the populations are small. The organization of food gathering and hunting activities is done through the smallest social unit—the nuclear family, with perhaps one or two additional members. Several such units combine together to form the band which moves from place to place in search of fresh pastures for hunting and gathering food. Here the unit for production is the same as the basic kinship unit of the nuclear family. The division of labour is minimal, based only to some extent on age and sex. This is the simplest socio-economic unit known.

Larger nomadic tribes men combine hunting with the domestication of animals such as the Nuer and the Todas. With sufficient availability of grazing land, animal husbandry is capable of supporting large populations. The domesticated animals provide meat, milk and skin. Moreover with domestication, the population is able to control the availability of food resources—the uncertainty factor being reduced. The population is able to divert time and energies towards pursuits other than of bare subsistence. Although the development of social structure has been related to the availability of resources and the production of surplus, later anthropologists, such as Sahlins, have shown that even amongst the most primitive bushmen there is no dearth of leisure time and food is available in plenty for basic subsistence. The nature and diversity of activities depends upon the values pursued by the particular culture and not merely upon resources and time. Economic surplus is thus linked with the goals pursued by the particular culture. Complexity of social structures is by and large linked with greater exploitation of natural resources, the most remarkable transition being from the hunting, food-gathering and pastoralist stage to the agriculturalist stage.

Such societies as are able to grow their own crops are able to support a large and sedentary population. When a sufficient



quantity of surplus food is produced the population divides itself into producers and non-producers of food. A section of the population having freed itself from the activities of food production develops complex systems of authority and also higher levels of ritual and artistic creativity are reached. Such was the development of archaic civilizations.

Anthropologists in their study of primitive economics are faced with a wide range of societies with various types of economic activities and scale of structural complexities from primitive hunting and food-gathering tribes to agricultural peasantry. Robert Redfield has drawn distinctions between primitive and peasant societies—the latter being a part of a civilization rather than an independent whole. While talking of primitive economics we then for analytical purposes confine ourselves to pre-agricultural economies—though the scope of economic anthropology extends easily into peasant and even pre-capitalist urban societies.

Primitive productive processes can be generalized to have the following characteristics : a simple technology—this does not actually imply simplicity in the sense of diminished efficiency or even complexity of ideas—but that the number of steps intervening between the raw material and finished product is few. The tools are more on extension of the human anatomy enabling the human agent to work more efficiently rather than a replacement for the human agency like a modern machine.

b) The division of labour is such that most individuals are able to perform all tasks required to provide them with subsistence living. All households are economically self-sufficient, the division of labour between husband, wife and children being sufficient to cover all economic activities required in the society. A man is essentially in control of his own labour resources. Labour in a primitive economy does not enter the market. Additional labour for any task is recruited on the basis of kinship or ritual or political authority such as that of a shoman or chief.

The relationships of production are thus derived from non-economic relations of kinship or ritual. Organization of production is a social rather than economic activity although the ends pursued are economic.

**C**      **tion.** From the above it follows directly that

in primitive economies there is little division of labour in production people consume what they produce. The scale and nature of consumption is set by the cultural goals as well as the availability of resources and level of technology. Though the latter largely influences the former the relationship is not one of total dependence. It is often found that a tribe may avoid a particular food item although it may be available in plenty—togenic animals are one such example. The quantity of consumption is also likewise largely value oriented rather than need-based, physical requirements being only one variable, custom and choice being others—though choice is also culturally conditioned.

**Exchange.** Although primitive productive systems with their minimal division of labour provide little need for exchange for subsistence goods or for purposes of subsistence—even in the most primitive some form of exchange always takes place. The reasons for these exchanges are not for subsistence but that in a society human beings need to establish and reaffirm social relationships and this can only be done through exchange. Exchange in primitive communities is an expression of social, ritual and political relationships rather than a utilization activity. In the small hunting and food-gathering bands, the meat of the hunted animal is divided amongst different members of the tribe in accordance with the kinship relationship borne to the hunter. Although after giving and receiving portions due to him he may find himself with almost the same quantity he started with, yet in the process important relationships have been acknowledged and reaffirmed.

Exchange for utilization purposes is not altogether absent, especially between different tribes. If neighbouring tribes have access to different resources or skills then exchange for utilization purposes takes place between them. In the absence of a medium of exchange in most primitive economies exchange takes place by the system of *barter*—in which a direct exchange of the goods takes place. For the purpose of barter an individual with an article which he wishes to dispose of has to look for a partner who is willing to take the article in exchange for an article of use to the former individual. In Tikopia, Firth has recorded that regular exchange takes place between the coastal and inland population—the former supplying the latter with fish in exchange

for taro. The quantities of items exchanged are fixed by custom and do not follow any demand and supply situation. Mary Douglas has written that among the Lele she found it impossible to obtain anything with the raffia cloth used in barter as nobody would give her anything in exchange for francs there being no cultural equivalence of any article in terms of money. However the inter-tribal exchanges unlike intra-tribal ones are mainly for economic purposes and do not necessarily establish any social relationship. An extreme case cited may be that of *silent barter*: two extremely hostile tribes who wish to exchange goods follow this system. Any face-to-face encounter between the tribesmen is dangerous because of the traditional hostility they have towards each other. According to this form of barter one of the tribesmen places the goods they wish to exchange at a pre-appointed place at a pre-appointed time and then hide themselves after giving a shout or making suitable noise to inform the other party who keep themselves in hiding; the other party comes out only when the first one has disappeared and in turn they place their own goods, take the goods meant for them and disappear. Thus the whole transaction takes place without either party coming face-to-face with each other.

Karl Polanyi, in his *Trade and Markets in the Early Empires* divides all exchange into three types (a) reciprocal, (b) redistribution and (c) market exchange. The reciprocal exchanges are of the nature we have discussed earlier. These are done on a face-to-face basis, the social relationship being more important than the items being exchanged. Sometimes, as in the case of gift giving, material goods may be exchanged for non-material considerations, such as a kinsman may be given a gift in exchange for service rendered or simply as a consideration for his superior status. Sometimes exchange is for *ceremonial purposes*, in which gifts usually flow towards a person of higher status from person or persons of lower status. Gifts made at marriages, ritual occasions or to political chiefs are of this nature. Sometimes as in the case of the famous Kula exchange—the very nature of the gifts may be of a ceremonial nature, endowing the possessor of the gifts with ceremonial status and the act of giving with ceremonial significance.

The Kula is actually a form of trade but which differs from all

known forms of trade in involving articles of no utility value but only ceremonial value. These are arm shells and necklets of red shell disc. These two articles travel in a circular route covering a very large area involving islands of the East and of new Guinea, the Lousiades, Woodlark islands, The Laughlans, The Trolubriond Archipelago and The d'Entrecataut Group.

There are definite rules of exchange and are carried out between partners who enter into a life long relationship. The armshell always travels towards the South and the necklets of shell-bead to the North. The article to be traded is given as a gift to a partner, who is obliged to return an article of equivalent value on a subsequent trip. This can even be done in instalments, the intermediary gift which is of lesser value being known as the *bas* and the final gift of equivalent value known as the *Kudu*.

Each article circulated in the *kula* ring is well known, has a name and history and the actual act of presentation of an article is surrounded by ceremonial and subsidiary gift giving. This type of exchange is distinguished from the common type of trade barter known as *gimwali*.

Nobody should keep an article with him for more than a year and all the articles should keep moving forward in the right direction. There can be no backward trade. The value of an article depends on the mythology surrounding it which has mainly to do with its magical powers.

The *Kula* involves large scale and often long distance and hazardous expeditions. Side by side with *Kula* large scale trading in consumption articles goes on which are carried on in the manner of ordinary trade or *gimwali* and involves haggling and pricing of goods.

When reciprocal gift giving takes place between social equals such as friends or kinsmen of equal status then a particular rule is always followed, this rule being that at any time the gift given and received is unequal such that one person is always under obligation to the other to reciprocate the gift. Exact equivalence would mean termination of the relationships for individuals of equal status would be under no obligation to each other. Foster has discussed this type of relationship elaborately in his paper on "dyadic relationships."

**Redistribution**—While the first type of exchange can and does

take place in all types of society the second type can take place only where there is a centralization of authority. This involves essentially a flow of goods towards a centre and consequent redistribution. A tribal chief by virtue of his status is entitled to gift from his subjects—the gifts that flow towards him are an acknowledgment of his superior status. However in order to reaffirm his superiority he is not to hoard the goods—which would be a slur on his status but to redistribute them in terms of a ceremonial feast or gift making. Such ceremonial spending gives a boost to his status though leaving him materially poor. In most precapitalist societies ceremonial spending rather than actually material wealth is a sign of superior status. This gives rise to the so-called 'levelling mechanisms' which makes it compulsory for men of high status to undertake elaborate ceremonial spending in order to maintain their status. Thus a considerable material homogeneity is maintained in the society alongwith status hierarchy. Amongst the Kwakiutle, the elaborate ceremony of potlatch serves exactly a similar function. 'Potlatch' is a custom found amongst the North Pacific Coast Indians. The word 'potlatch' simply means giving. It was basically a ceremonial in which a chief hosted a feast in which wealth gifts were given to the guest. The occasions were marriage of an important person, birth of a potential heir to a title, inheritance and formal assumption of one of these titles and crests and rescue of ransom and restoration to free status of a war captive. Any person who legally inherited a position, crest or title could not rightfully acquire the position and privileges accruing to it unless it was formalized by a potlatch. It was a method of legalizing through public announcement and gift giving.

The guests were formally invited and seated according to rank. The seating arrangements always followed strict protocol. Offerings are made to the dead ancestor whose title is to be inherited and public announcements made of gifts and their quantities. The chiefs are accompanied by their secretaries who note down all the gifts. The potlatch validated not only the rank of the person inheriting the title but also of the guests. All invited guests of noble rank were expected in the future to 'potlatch' and return with adequate generosity the gifts they had received. Since a very large amount of valuables are involved a chief has to spend

a long time collecting them. Normally a chief gave only one potlatch in a lifetime, that is, when he assumed his title.

Another type of potlatch is known as rivalry potlatch. In this, large amounts of goods are destroyed—coppers broken, canoes smashed and money thrown in the fire to humiliate a rival. Competition between two men for a specific status resulted in rivalry potlatch. One rival would give a potlatch to stake his claim, the other would stage a potlatch to put forward rival claim, the first one would reply with another potlatch and the cycle would go on and on till one of the claimants went bankrupt and could not stage another potlatch. The other would get the title by default. Or some of the other chiefs could support one claimant and support his claim during a potlatch.

Another occasion for potlatch was 'face-saving' when a chief lost face by some reason like tripping during a ceremony of being taken prisoner and captured during a war. His only way to regain face would be to stage 'potlatch'.

Almost all rivalry potlatches are either to establish or alter the order of precedence of groups and the attempt to claim a vacant title of status. Sometimes rivalry potlatches were "feigned" by two chiefs only as a means of entertainment and which always resulted in a draw. The most valuable article involved in a potlatch was a copper which is nothing but a beaten sheet of copper with a T shaped ridge. As they moved from person to person their value increased. The breaking of a copper was the peak of a 'potlatch' ceremony symbolizing distribution of great wealth.

Walter C. Neale has analyzed the medieval 'jajmani' system in India as a system of redistribution, where the grain from the producers is pooled and distributed amongst the people of the village with a share for all non-producing service castes.

With greater centralization of authority as in a feudal society the redistribution takes the form of taxation. Those in authority lay taxes on the subjects and the tax thus collected is partly spent on the subjects and partly on the maintenance of the ruling elite.

**Market Exchange.** This involves an exchange of goods for purely economic purposes. In economic anthropological literature, market place, trade and market principles are to be distinguished

from each other. While market place and trade are to be found in almost every society, it is a matter of debate, whether or not market principles are also found in every society or not. Market places are centres for the exchange of goods between different tribes or villages. The transaction taking the form of direct trading between good or goods in exchange for some form of money or common denominator of exchange. The characteristic of such trading is that the equivalences are determined more by tradition and a face-to-face haggling at the market place itself rather than by any system of pricing controlled by a network of demand and supply. Such pre-capitalist markets are geographically localized and the forces operating in them are of local traditions rather than of farflowing market networks such as in capitalist market networks.

Market principles, such as we understand them in modern economic theory consist of principles such as demand and supply, theory of unlimited wants, marginal utility and the principle of maximization. The last named presupposes a universal psychological tendency on the part of both consumers and producers to maximize their gain at every economic transaction. In other words it implies a tendency to allocate ones available resources towards goals giving maximum profit.

In primitive economies where economic transactions are largely ruled by custom rather than calculation and there is lack of an all purpose medium of exchange like modern money. *Primitive money*, even where it exists, is of a different character than modern money although in some places it largely approximates it. One of the chief characteristics of primitive money is that it has a restricted field of application. Unlike a modern economy where almost everything including human labour has a value in terms of money, in primitive societies all things do not center a generalized sphere of exchange. Most primitive societies are characterized by what Raymond Firth calls different spheres of exchange. The different spheres of exchange are characterized by circulation of a certain type of goods. Goods in one sphere cannot be exchanged for goods in another sphere because there can be no equivalency in terms of value. Most anthropological works also indicate that subsistence goods rarely enter the sphere of trade and are restricted to reciprocal or redistrib-

butive type of exchange. This ensures that no member of society is lacking in basic subsistence requirement because since subsistence goods form part of reciprocity, every individual by fact of being a member of society and part of its kinship network, is assured of a share. Trading is done mostly in items of conspicuous consumption—such as of decorative or prestige value. Generalized money is used mostly in the context of such exchanges especially since they mostly take place across tribal boundaries. Money need not take the form it takes in our society—shells, teeth, hutters, rice grains or pigs can all be used as money, the only requirement being that the item should be available in plenty and not be of immediate consumer value.

Such characteristics of primitive systems of production and exchange led to divergence of opinions regarding the character of primitive economies. While followers of one school of thought believed that inspite of all institutional differences the basic psychological process of economic behaviour was the same, that is, all individuals in all societies 'economized', hence principles of modern economics were applicable to all economies. Followers of other school of thought maintained that each economy was best studied in its own institutional organization that 'embedddness' of the economy in the social system made it futile to apply modern economic theory. The former, known as the formalists, followed a synchronic, functional approach, emphasizing the behavioural aspects of the economy and concentrating more on processes of exchange. In their latter form they evolve into the social exchange theories where institutions are seen as epiphenomenon to processes of choice and exchange. The principle of maximization is given many a second thought and after many modifications such as optimization etc. finally replaced by symbolic interaction.

The second school of thought, the substantirists followed a diachronic, historical approach, emphasizing the institutional aspects of the economy and concentrating more on the processes of productions. Historical materialism and Marxist anthropology are developments on this branch.

### Scope of Economic Anthropology

Economics as a science and the ideas and concepts constituting it have largely been derived with the western capitalist market



dominated society as a model. Economists and their accepted tools are inadequate when applied to societies where, as explained already, the economy exists in an entirely different form. Now one way of dealing with the problem would be to deny the existence of an economy to them altogether and this is what was done till recent times. Earlier anthropologists included at best a study of material culture and technology as part of the cultural system. But no meaningful analysis was conducted in this respect.

The study of pre-capitalist or traditional economies is increasingly becoming important because the capitalist frontier in the form of a rapidly expanding world market economy is penetrating deeper and deeper into all the remote recesses of the world. Modernization as it is defined as expansion of scientific technology, western education and ideology, agricultural innovations, and spread of commercialization is catching up everywhere and in order to compete and survive in the world wide quest for resources the so-called underdeveloped or third world countries with their history of pre-capitalist economies are trying hard to change themselves rapidly. This has led to great interest and necessity for developmental studies.

Studies in economic development have been tied closely with social change because social and economic variables are closely tied everywhere. It is the work of economic anthropologists to identify this linkage through detailed case studies, involving in-depth data collection and show the possibilities of introducing development and change with greatest effect, least possibility of rejection and least social trauma. It has been shown time and again that indiscriminately introduced change causes either outright rejection or widespread social anomie. A classic example is that of Salisbury's study of steel axes for stone age Indians. It is only when we understand the social and economic to be constituting a system that we can understand the processes of development and change and this is an imperative in policy implementation for introducing economic development both in urban and rural areas.

Although primitive economics is associated largely with tribal and peasant economies even in urban centres in developing countries there are particles of traditional economies which show remarkable resilience in the face of change. Such economic

sectors lend themselves to economic anthropological methods of study. This book deals with one such economy and they are found everywhere. A major field of study, namely political economy—studies the interaction of pre-capitalist and capitalist economies at a macro-level. How the developing countries are interacting with the developed countries and how capitalism is affecting and using pre-capitalist economies is a part of the scope of economic anthropologists. They study it through the interaction of the two at a primary level. The growth of urban centers, the concomittant problems, problems of urban malnutrition, growth of slums, migratory labour, migration from third world to developed countries, the policies of the developed countries towards third world countries and the effect it has—are all shown through case studies as well as large scale comparative research work.

Survival and adaptation is an aspect of study of economic anthropologists which traces the history of specific economies to come to rationale for their existence in particular forms. Such theories are evolutionary in nature and explain in a diachronic perspective the adaptation of the system to environment and both existing form and change as a result of such processes of adaptation to its environment. In such studies economic anthropology ties up with ecology and environmental studies to show resource technology and systems of production to be faithfully tied up to form meaningful system studies in resources utilization, introduction of technological innovations are fruitfully done under such heads.

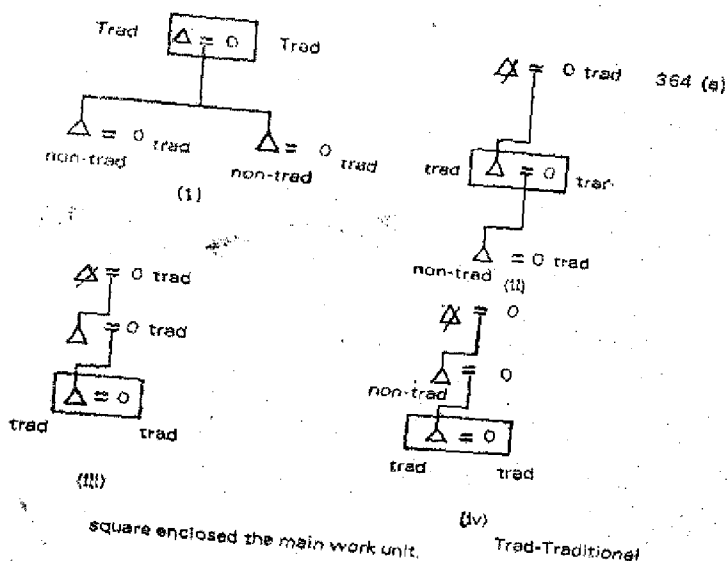
### APPENDIX III

#### Nuclearization of Households

In the chapter on Production we had shown that the work unit of 1 adult male and 1 adult female is the most efficient in terms of work output and pragmatically the covert reason behind the breakup of joint households lies in the underuse of labour power in a larger household. Here we shall show that even those households that are joint, are so only under certain conditions and in many instances the basic work unit of 1 adult male and 1 adult female is rarely duplicated in real terms of work input. The nuclearization in terms of work units is more real than in terms of members of the household. For example old and incapacitated persons form part of joint households but not part of the work unit. Secondly female members of the household are of necessity incorporated into the traditional work organization because of the cultural restrictions placed on them by which they can neither obtain education nor can they be gainfully employed outside the traditional occupation.

In our data we have seven joint households in which only one male member is linked with two or even three female members in the work unit. These can be a man, his wife and two daughters-in-law, the sons being occupied in non-traditional occupation. Or it can be an old aged grandmother with son and daughter-in-law and wife of grandson who is again in non-traditional occupation. In one case it is the father who is in non-traditional occupation. In another case we have a widowed grandmother, a widowed mother and her son and daughter-in-law.

Now all these households, although organizationally classified as joint households, correspond in practical economic terms to the one male, one female work unit—the extra women being there either because of a man's duty towards his parents or because the husbands of the women are in a non-traditional occupation. The following diagrams will make it clear.



Each of the above diagrams represents households where the one male, one female unit is supplemented by other female members of the extended household. These households are stable and there is no scope for further nuclearization.

There are two more situations where a stable extended joint household is possible. In the first case we have a duplication of the 1 male, 1 female work unit but which exists in a two generation depth, i.e. we have an extended household. Here, by the role of ultimogeniture the old parents are left with the youngest son and daughter-in-law, who while duplicating the older work unit are also its replacement. The cultural rule of ultimogeniture fits in well with the economic necessity of restricting the work unit, for by the time the youngest son gets married the parents are too old to put in the full quota of work. This is further supported by the long reproductive span of traditional dhobi women, most of whom have borne children upto the age of forty-five or fifty, numbering even upto eighteen or twenty. This means that even though the youngest son and daughter-in-law stay on with the parents, they are not duplicating the work unit so much as replacing the aged parents and it is they, who inherit the fathers' clients as well as his production goods.

The second situation is related not to any traditional feature inherent in the social and economic organization but to the

forces of modernization and change. Diversification of occupations and education has served to distort the pattern of nuclearization and inheritance. A father having several sons does not train all of them in the traditional occupation. In many cases only one son follows his father's occupation and continues to live with his father, while the other sons follow non-traditional occupation—their wives however help the in-laws with the household work. Whichever son follows the traditional occupation then becomes the potential replacement for his father, to inherit his clients and work—and he need not be the youngest son. In several cases he is the eldest or the second son.

In atleast two cases where the second son is following the traditional occupation and the eldest is in non-traditional occupation, it is the former, who has been married off first before the elder brother, in order to ensure a replacement of the traditional work unit.

In a situation where all, or some of the sons are not in traditional occupation the pattern of nuclearization changes. For those in non-traditional occupation, it is not economically necessary to separate from the parental household and some of them continue to live within the joint household.

The unstable joint household is where the son in traditional occupation is married and stays on in the parental household till such time as a convenient excuse is found for him to separate his hearth. In this case the latent force for separation was always there and fully realized by both parents and son but since the ideology of the joint household prevails in the culture, it is not considered proper for a son to separate his hearth immediately after marriage—as is done in a western culture, where the ideology of the nuclear household predominates.

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